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SIR JASPER'S TENANT

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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SIR JASPER'S TENANT

CHAPTER I.

THE GATHERING OF THE DOBBITES.

HAVING pledged himself to the carrying out of the entertainment which he had himself originated, Mr. Dobb was not the man to draw back, however distracted he might be by other interests. As prime mover of the picnic on Lemley Hills, Mr. Dobb's honour was involved in the success of the entertainment; so between the twenty-fifth of August and the first of September he had very little time to think of Twopenny-Postman. The day came in due course, and was exactly the kind of day that all picnickers would demand of Providence, if they dared beseech so temporal a boon—

as good as curaçoa; but then "almost" is a very wide word.

An omnibus had been hired for the conveyance of the party, and that vehicle overshadowed Mr. Dobb's mansion, while the clerk regaled his friends in the parlour. To the denizens of Amanda Villas, stationed at windows and lounging on door-steps, an omnibus might have been the newest and rarest object in creation, so fondly did they gaze on the vehicle, on which "Railway Station," "Roxborough Arms," "Castleford," "King's Head," were inscribed in gilded capitals. But although an omnibus devoted to the public service may be the most commonplace of conveyances, there is something almost awful in the idea of an omnibus withdrawn from its common uses and placed at the disposal of an individual. To have the destiny of an omnibus in one's own hands; to be able to order that mighty vehicle to the right or the left; to take it up narrow lanes and ignominious turnings; to keep it standing unconscionable periods before one's own door, is to feel a sense of power that is not without its intoxicating

influence. It is to feel, in a minor degree, the triumphant thrill that must have stirred the veins of Joshua at Ajalon; it is to enjoy the sense of masterdom that makes a Robespierre drunken with blood, when he finds the axe of the national guillotine a plaything for his cruel hand.

Henry Adolphus was not proof against the intoxication of the omnibus. He looked at it with a fond admiring gaze, and discovered points of beauty which he had never found in that class of vehicle until now. And then there was the delight of packing the comestibles; the hampers which had to be "humoured," as the driver of the noble vehicle said; the brown bottles that had to be "offered" to all sorts of niches and corners, and were generally refused as too long or too wide. Surely so many gallon-measures of beer, so many hampers of provision, so many open baskets of green stuffs, were never stowed into the recesses of one omnibus since the invention of that vehicle. A savoury odour, as of roast-fowl and overdone veal-pie, pervaded the atmosphere of Amanda Villas; and the mouths of Mr. Dobb's neighbours

watered as basket after basket was handed into the vehicle, amid the rather derisive cheers of the juvenile population gathered around the gate.

Dorothy arrived in the chaise-cart, driven by a hobbledehoy brother, and accompanied by two rosy-cheeked sisters; for so splendid had been the contributions from the home-farm, that Mr. Dobb had extended his invitations to the Tursgood family. And over and above all past contributions, Dorothy brought with her an offering which eclipsed all meaner gifts as the sun eclipses the stars. Miss Denison had been pleased to give her little maid pleasure on the occasion of this family festival, and had ordered the butler to pack a basket of wine—real wine, such as Sir Jasper drank with his own patrician lips, and which Sir Jasper's friends considered it a privilege to share. The butler had done the thing with that liberality which distinguishes human nature in the disposal of other people's property.

Mr. Dobb could not resist the temptation of opening the basket; while his friends watched his proceedings in rapt admiration. The basket con-

tained wines which the Dobb circle had only read of in books. Hock, in a tall tapering bottle; sparkling Moselle and Burgundy, in dainty envelopes of pink paper; a tiny flask of Maraschino, encased in wicker-work; a bottle of Madeira; and a bottle of port that had been bottled before Miss Denison's birth. There were half-a-dozen bottles in all; and Mr. Dobb, counting them as they stood in a dazzling little cluster on his table, wondered whether he was bound in honour to devote the entire number to his friends' delectation, or whether he might not fairly subtract a bottle or so for home consumption. But the eyes of his guests were upon him, and the hands of his guests were officiously active in putting the bottles back into the basket. Mr. Dobb watched their proceedings pensively, and began to think that he was rather a loser by this picnic.

A cruel disappointment awaited poor Dorothy in her cousin's little parlour. She was looking so bright and happy in her neat muslin gown and pretty straw hat shadowing the rosy modest face, and hiding the dancing light in the hazel eyes;

but her cherry-red under-lip fell like the lip of a child who is going to cry, when Mrs. Dobb gave her a little carelessly-folded, illegibly-written three-cornered note, which had been brought to Amanda Villas by a private in Gervoise Catheron's regiment early that morning.

"MY DEAREST DOLL," scrawled the lieutenant, "I have some confounded business on my hands that will keep me in Castleford till after the two-o'clock post, and sha'n't be able to join your party in time for the 'bus. If I can borrow any brute in the way of a horse, I'll ride over to the Hills in time to have a chat with my pretty pet; and in the mean time she must enjoy herself without the most miserable devil in existence, and her devoted

G. C."

The termination of the little note was not calculated to increase Dorothy's happiness; but already she had discovered that to fondly love an unprincipled scamp is not quite the royal road to perfect peace and joy. She had begun to suffer all those vicarious tortures which it is woman's mission to endure. She was not yet Mrs. Cathe-

ron; but she had already assumed that unequal share in a man's existence which it is the privilege of a wife to enjoy. She could no more have smoked one of the lieutenant's regalias than she could have drilled his men; but the debt which Mr. Catheron owed his tobacconist weighed more heavily on her mind than it did on his. And surely it was she who owed so much money to the tailor, and she who lived in hourly dread of arrest, and she who was snubbed and ill-treated by her commanding officer, and she who had lost money on the turf. Gervoise told her all his troubles, and the sympathetic little heart made a new torture for itself out of his every anxiety.

It would have been a relief to her to have cried a little after the perusal of her lover's letter; but she was fain to gulp down her tears and to look forward as hopefully as she could to the chance of seeing Gervoise in the afternoon. Unhappily Mr. Catheron was not the best possible hand at keeping a promise; and poor Dorothy's heart sickened as she thought how the long sunshiny day might drag itself out above all these

noisy people without any blessed hour bringing her lover to her side, until the sun went down on her desolation. She was glad to get into the farthest corner of the omnibus; and sat silent and unnoticed, while the vehicle drove at a dashing pace through the little streets, where the new houses looked such flimsy boxes of brick-and-mortar—so much mortar and so little brick—and were all so bare and raw of aspect, like slack-baked half-quartern loaves. They dashed into the High Street presently, and then away along the straggling outskirts of the town, where Mr. Dobb, who acted as conductor, and suspended himself from a leathern strap in the most perilous attitude he could assume, had ample scope for the indulgence of his lively fancy. That the vivacious Dobb bawled "City," "Bank," "Charing Cross," &c., after the approved manner of the professional metropolitan conductor; that he plunged his head into the vehicle to ask if any gentleman would ride outside for the accommodation of a lady; that he bade his friends get their money ready, and informed them that "children must be paid for;"

that he goaded small boys to madness by asking them benevolently if they would have a ride, and insulting them by derisive gestures when they showed an inclination to accept his kindly offers; that he bewildered the drivers of passing vehicles by telling them in confidence that the omnibus contained the patients of the county lunatic-asylum—that the light-whiskered man on the knife-board was dangerous, and the elderly lady in the black bonnet had murdered eleven small children with a gingham umbrella; that he scared the senses of homely-faced market-women by offering to take them to impossible places; that he drove sportsmen to distraction by pantomimic expressions of terror at sight of their guns, and by insulting suggestions as to the probability of their shooting their own boots; and that he did not hold his tongue for three consecutive minutes during the whole of the journey,—are facts that scarcely need any record. Given a facetious individual of the Dobb species, and poor indeed must be that imagination which will not enable its owner to prophesy the manner

in which he will conduct himself on any particular occasion.

Nor was the brewer's-clerk in the least degree exhausted by the exertions of the journey. His agreeable spirits did not abandon him once during that long blazing September day. Pleasure-seekers who enjoyed themselves upon the Lemley Hills were subject to that penalty which belongs to all elevated regions,—the obligation to stare wildly into space in search of such objects as the dome of St. Paul's, the towers of Canterbury Cathedral, the Monument, Windsor Castle, Beechy Head, and other celebrated points of sight. No sooner had Mr. Dobb's party alighted from the vehicle than this species of torture began. Officious young men produced pocket-telescopes, which upon application to the normal eye only increased the mistiness of the atmosphere, but by aid of which the possessors of the instruments pretended to distinguish the more salient features of five counties. Then commenced those differences of opinion that always arise upon these occasions. The dark splotch on the horizon which

Mr. Spinner pointed out as Windsor Castle, Mr. Pocombe declared to be Canterbury Cathedral; the spiky appearance which according to Mr. Sanders indicated the Needles, Mr. Smith positively affirmed was neither more nor less than the steeple of Langham Church; and then the vivacious Dobb availed himself of the opening presented to his genius, and pointed out the Rock of Gibraltar, Mount Vesuvius in full play, the topmost range of the Himalayas, the Kremlin, and the Wellington statue at Hyde-Park Corner; nor did he fail to describe the appearance of the Queen and the young Princesses, at that moment promenading on the slopes at Windsor, and distinctly to be beheld by the naked eye; and standing on tiptoe, and craning forward into space, Mr. Dobb declared that the savoury odours of the royal shoulder-of-mutton and onion-sauce, then being prepared in the Castle-kitchen, floated upward across the heather and the harebells, and inspired yearnings for the immediate opening of the baskets. After this the business of the day began—a hamper was opened, and the revellers

had what they called a "snack;" but as it was a snack that involved the consumption of about a gallon of half-and-half, the voices and the spirits of the merrymakers rose considerably ere it was concluded. When the snack had been disposed of, the party broke up into little groups; and the chief amusement they found available seemed to consist in descending the steep hill-side for a few yards in a little nervous run, and then tumbling ignominiously and sliding to the bottom, not without a good deal of bumping against sharp stones and scraping over thorny bushes; after which ordeal there was all the delightful labour of scrambling up again over a slippery turf that afforded a very indifferent hold for the human foot encumbered by the boot of civilisation. Dorothy's brother and sisters and the younger members of the company found a little hazel copse at the foot of one of the hills, and enjoyed themselves noisily among the rustling bushes. Poor Dorothy herself took little pleasure in the vulgar riotous companionship, the bare sunburnt hills, the plethora of good things to eat and

drink. The castled crag of Drachenfels is a very dreary place without the "gentle hand" and the "dear eyes" of the one beloved companion, who carries an atmosphere of Paradise into the dullest regions. Of course the great business of the day was the dinner. Whatever rapture Mr. Dobb's party might affect as they gazed upon the romantic landscape, the hazy distances, the purple horizon, and all the changing effects of light and shade that dappled the pastoral valleys and played upon the distant heights, the eyes of the pleasure-seekers were apt to wander back to the spot where Mrs. Dobb and another matron sat on the grass keeping guard over the baskets. A profound sigh of satisfaction arose simultaneously from every breast when the lively Dobb gave the signal for opening the hampers. Then, and then only, the real excitement of the picnic began. Torn muslins, sunburnt faces, scratched hands, and bruised elbows,—all the penalties attendant on rustic enjoyment were forgotten in the all-absorbing task of preparation. Spinner developed so great a talent for the arrangements of a dinner-

table, that he exposed himself to his vivacious friend's witticisms, and was declared to have begun life as a waiter in a cheap eating-house. Sanders showed himself a Hercules in the drawing of corks. Pocombe announced himself as gifted in the art of compounding a salad; and exhibited his talent by chopping the lettuces into a vegetable mincemeat, and then plunging them into a cold bath of vinegar. But this primitive mixture, which would have set a Brillat Savarin's teeth on edge for life, was highly approved of by Mr. Dobb's party, who seemed to have an abnormal capacity for the consumption of vinegar.

It would be a waste of labour to carry your dinner five hundred feet above the dome of St. Paul's, unless you were sure of an approved appetite as a compensation for so much trouble. The Dobbites had no reason for complaint upon this score; the feast was a triumphal progress—from fowl and ham to fowl and tongue, from veal-pie to duck, from duck to beef and salad, from beef and salad to pastry, from pastry to cheese, and from cheese to every thing of a

choleric tendency in the way of fruit. Poor sentimental Dorothy blushed for her cousin's circle, and was almost glad her lover was not there to see what vulgar ravenous creatures her kindred owned for their friends.

Sir Jasper's wine had been reserved for the concluding splendour of the feast, and was duly handed round and discussed. Whether it was quite agreeable to the taste of the party may be a little doubtful. No one was bold enough to express an adverse opinion; and a party of connoisseurs dining at the Carlton could not have held their glasses up to the light, or inspected the little oily drops trickling on the transparent rim of the vessel, with a more critical aspect or a more orthodox air of deliberation. The mysterious old woman in the black bonnet brought discredit upon her kindred by remarking that the Maraschino was "the best gin-and-peppermint she ever remembered partaking of;" but what can you expect from a person who wears a poke bonnet, and who is darkly suspected of having received three-and-sixpence a week from the

parish in one specially hard winter? "It's all very well to talk about your days being long in the land, and so forth," said Mr. Dobb when he discussed the day's proceedings in the bosom of his family; "but there's nothing in the Catechism about taking your mother to picnics, and I think Smith ought to have known better."

After the feast there was more tumbling down the hills and tearing of muslins; and by and by some one organised a circle for kiss-in-the-ring, which is a nice laborious game for a shadowless hill-top on a blazing afternoon; and the Dobbites grew livelier and louder as the sun sloped westward. To say that any one of the party had taken too much in the way of alcoholic stimulant would be to bring against them an accusation which with one indignant voice would have been repudiated; but there are few amongst the merry-makers who, looking for Windsor Castle in the distance, would not have been liable to be mystified by a vision of two towering keeps where only one should have appeared. There was a pleasant haziness in the minds of the Dobbites at this time

in the afternoon, a dreamy indifference as to the future, a doubtful sensation with regard to the past, a shadowy idea that they had been enjoying themselves upon the Lemley Hills for a month or so, a vague uncertainty as to the day of the week and the time of year, and a benevolence of feeling that embraced the universe, and was pathetic even to tears in its expression to individuals.

The sun was low in that bright western heaven, and a cool breeze came floating upwards from the valleys, as Dorothy wandered, sad and solitary, at some little distance from the noisy circle capering round and round on the hill-top. The eligible young men of the party had tried their hardest to induce Dorothy to join in their primitive sport, but she had drawn herself indignantly away from them; and there went a murmur round the circle to the effect that Miss Tursgood was keeping company with an officer, and was proud. The feminine portion of the company said "Stuck up!" and there were indignant exclamations of "Well, I'm sure!" "Did you ever

see such airs?" "We must be engaged to a duke, I should think, at the very least!"

Dorothy walked away from them all with a swelling heart. Kiss-in-the-ring, indeed, with all those vulgar warm half-tipsy people; and *he* was descended from Edward the Confessor! If he had only been a linen-draper's apprentice, he would have been with her all day, like Miss Spinner's young man, who had been perambulating the hills with his arm round the waist of his affianced in the eye of assembled mankind. And *he* was not coming at all; though he must have known how wearisome the long day would be to her without him. She could venture to cry now; and she did shed piteous tears under the shadow of her pretty hat—the hat she had decorated for him, for him, for him! Ah, miserable universe, which took all its light from him, and which became utter blackness and eclipse in his absence! And youth is such a delicious season, say the poets and romancers; and it is so sad to lose that early freshness of feeling; and the sound head of the philosopher is so miserable an exchange for the

passionate heart of the boy. Is there not a cross-grain of falsehood in the fabric of this truth? Is not that rather a spurious sentimentality which makes a man look back to the days when he was flogged for a false quantity or forgotten tense, and fancy the usher's rod must have been so delightful? There are people who would envy Dorothy her youth and freshness; but is it so very delicious to wander lonely on a sunburnt hill-side, suffering tortures of bitter disappointment and wounded love for the sake of a dark-faced scamp in the marines, who never had been, and never could be, worth an honest woman's heart-ache? At eight-and-twenty Dorothy would have been wise enough to estimate the lieutenant's character at its just value, and to resign herself to the conviction that her only chance of happiness lay in sending him about his business at the earliest opportunity. At eighteen she thought of nothing, she remembered nothing, except that he had a straight nose and dark haggard eyes, and that she was ready to die for his sake; to die, as the Frenchwoman has it, not to save his life—that

would be too easy a sacrifice—but to expire for no other reason than because he told her to die; to perish for the gratification of his passing whim; to throw away her existence in order that he might be pleased for a moment.

While she was thinking of his unkindness; while the girlish heart ached as if with an open wound, the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard faintly in the distance, and all her sorrow was changed into joy. It was he. Who else should be riding to the Lemley Hills on that particular afternoon? She ran to the ridge, below which the bridle-path wound upwards. Yes, it was he; the clear bright eyes recognised that slender figure, mounted on a wretched gray hack, which had the impress of the livery-stable upon its every limb. But if he had been mounted upon one of Phaeton's own team, or on one of those Venetian *cavalli sfrenati* which Peter Doria threatened to bridle, Dorothy could not have gazed upon him with fonder or more admiring eyes. She tripped lightly down the hill-side to meet him; and he dismounted at a turn of the path, and

walked up the slope by her side, leading the horse.

And Dorothy was happy. Her universe was light once more; though the sun that illumined it might have been brighter. When they came to the top of the hill, Mr. Catheron tied his horse to a hurdle, and left the animal to take what refreshment he could from the sunburnt grass, while his rider walked away with Dorothy. The lieutenant was very gloomy; and on being entreated piteously to reveal his sorrows, told his companion that things were as bad as they could be.

"I shall get kicked out of the confounded service, if I don't take care, Dolly," he said; "and then I suppose I must turn shoeblack or crossing-sweeper, or run backwards and forwards in the dust, selling Dorling's correct cards on Derby-days. You'd better give up all thoughts of me, Doll, and look out for somebody better worth having. I'm up to my eyes in trouble and difficulty and—disgrace, I suppose some people would call it."

"And can nobody help you, Gervoise?"

"Yes," answered the lieutenant almost fiercely; "any body could help me by lending me a few pounds; but nobody will do it."

"Oh, Gervoise, you know *I* would if I had the money."

"But you haven't got it, you see!" returned Mr. Catheron testily; "so it's no use talking of it. If you had the national debt, you'd lend it me, I daresay. There's lots of people who haven't got money who'd lend it me if they had it. I want to find the people who *have* got money and will lend it."

Mr. Dobb, whose inconstant spirit had wearied of kiss-in-the-ring, suddenly perceived the two figures loitering side by side on the edge of the hill, and came bounding towards them with his cut-away coat flapping on each side of him like a pair of wings.

"You go and have a game with the other ones, Dorothy," said the clerk; "Catheron and I have got something to say to each other."

Dorothy pouted, and looked appealingly at her lover.

"Yes, Doll," said the lieutenant, answering the look; "you go and amuse yourself with the others for a few minutes. Dobb wants to speak to me, and I want to speak to Dobb. Go—that's a darling."

The girl hesitated for a moment, a little indignant at this summary dismissal; and then the sweet womanly spirit triumphed over the sense of wounded dignity, and she released her lover's arm with a smile, and went away. His interests might be involved in this interview with Dobb, and was she to stand in his way—she whose love was such a slavish unquestioning devotion? She left the two men, but not to play at vulgar games with those noisy people, who were shouting and whooping at one another now in the convulsions of blind-man's-buff. She wandered alone, and at a distance from them, looking at the splendid sunset sky, and thinking very sadly of her lover's perplexities.

"Oh, if I were an heiress, like Miss Marcia!" she thought. "What happiness to take him all my money, and throw it under his feet!"

While Dorothy walked in one direction, Gervoise and the clerk paced slowly along the hill-side in the other.

"Well," said Mr. Dobb; "any news of the Postman?"

"Yes," answered the lieutenant; "he's receded in the betting, and now's the time to get on to him, if one had the chance; for he's as safe to win as a sovereign is to change into twenty shillings. There's been a report of his having got a strain in his trial; but the man that writes to me saw his trial, and warrants him to beat every thing that's out. I've got his letter in my pocket. I've waited all day, in hopes something would turn up that would enable me to send him a P.-O.-O. by to-night's post; but there's no chance, and the horse may go up with a run at any moment. You can read his letter if you like."

The fascinated Henry Adolphus was only too eager to peruse the precious document which Gervoise Catheron extracted from his waistcoat-pocket. It was a greasy little half-sheet of paper, and smelt strongly of stale tobacco.

"HONERED SIR," wrote Mr. Catheron's correspondent, "you can't do bad in laying on to the Postman as hard as you can lay. He's a sure card, he is, and there's a potful of money to be got out of him—by them as has the spunk to go in and win. The scums are almost all on him."

"What does he mean by 'the scums'?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"Oh, that's a way the swells have got of speaking of the book-men. 'Send me one of those scums, will you? I want to back something.' That's what your heavy swell says when he wants to speculate; but the scums make the big fortunes; and I know a man who gives three hundred a year for his house in Tyburnia, and began life by selling oranges. There's no good in your aristocrats coming any nonsense in the ring, you know. You remember what Lord George Bentinck said: 'All men are equal on the turf, and under it!' But you may as well go on with the letter."

"The scums are almost all on him, and I shall have hard lines to plant your money; so you'd

better send me a P.-O.-O. per return, and I'll get the best terms I can for you."

Mr. Dobb read and re-read the letter as he loitered at his friend's side. Prudence had whispered to him to beware of Mr. Catheron, whose sanguine expectations had so often resulted in disappointment; but prudence whispered no warning against the writer of this mystic communication, whose tone implied so much experience—who wrote of the Postman as if his winning were a certainty.

"If I *had* the money," said Henry Adolphus with sudden energy, "I'd lend it you. Yes, I would, Catheron, though you've sold me more than once; but I haven't got a stiver."

There was a pause before the lieutenant responded to this speech; and when he did speak it was in a lower voice than usual. "But you could *get* the money," he said, looking furtively at the clerk.

"How do you mean?"

"How do I mean! Come, Dobb, that won't do, you know. You know what I mean well

enough. It isn't to be supposed that a confidential clerk, and a *collecting*-clerk, in such a business as Sloper and Halliday's, hasn't money at his command. I *am* a lieutenant in the marines, but I'm not *quite* an ass for all that. You know well enough where to get money when you want it."

"*What!*" roared Henry Adolphus, turning savagely upon his companion. "Do you think I'd *steal* the money that passes through my hands in the way of business? What do you take me for?" cried Mr. Dobb. In the intensity of his indignation he for once in a way forgot to be facetious.

"Do I think you'd steal? That's all stuff and nonsense, Dobb. Of course I know you wouldn't steal. But who was talking about stealing? I'm sure I wasn't. As collecting-clerk for Sloper and Halliday, a considerable amount of money must pass through your hands; and I've no doubt there are times and seasons when a considerable sum lies idle in your custody."

"Not often. Never when old Sloper is at home. I should like to see the old bird at it!

That's not the little game for him. Your money or your life are his sentiments, and he sticks to 'em. When he's at home the iron safe in our office is cleared out every day ten minutes before the bank closes, and the venerable party carries over the necessary evil himself in a canvas-bag. Oh, he's a downy old bird is old Sloper. If he *was* born yesterday, he must have improved the shining hour in the interim like any number of the *apis-mellifica* tribe. Seventeen-and-sixpence petty cash is about the utmost you'll find on our premises after banking-hours when he's at home."

"But how about it when he *isn't* at home?"

"Well, when the ancient governor's out of the way there's a good deal of carelessness—*lesser Sally*, as our friend M. Jean Crapaud would remark. Young Halliday's a heavy swell, you know. Had his draggings-up at Eton, keeps his five-and-twenty-tonner on the Merdrid, and is always cutting the shop for 'a wet sheet and a flowing sea, a wind that follows fast,' and that sort of thing, you know."

"Well, *he* isn't so sharp about the cash, is he?"

"No; he leaves the money in my custody for weeks together sometimes—but if you think I'd take any advantage of his confidence, you're addressing yourself to the wrong party; and all I can say is, the individual *you* require is out of town, and not expected home for some time. So you'd better call this day three years, or next Monday twelvemonths, or at some equally approximate period," concluded Mr. Dobb, who had entirely recovered his self-possession and his Maddison-Mortonianism by this time.

The lieutenant bit his lips savagely.

"What a fool you are, Dobb!" he began.

"Overpowered by this involuntary homage from a discriminating assembly, I rise to—"

"Drop that rot for once in a way, can't you? If you think it's funny, I don't; so you may as well reserve it for somebody who can appreciate that kind of humour. You are a fool, because you won't give a fellow time to make a proposition to you; but before he can say half-a-dozen words, you begin to ride the high horse, and sermonise about your honesty, as if you'd been asked to steal

the crown-jewels, or manufacture a million of money in forged exchequer-bills. What I've got to say is this: old Sloper has gone to spend the autumn at Rotterdam with his wife and family, I know that as well as you do; and if Halliday leaves the money in your hands between this and the fifteenth, you may just as well make use of what you want as not. The Postman is safe to win—"

"But if he doesn't?"

"I tell you he *must*. The fellows who are backing him are men who never make mistakes; and they're not likely to be out this time. You can get twenty to one if you send your money up at once."

"I'll see all the race-horses in Christendom in the bottomless pit first!" exclaimed Mr. Dobb; "no, no, old fellow; I've got a character to lose, and I've got a wife to keep. Try some other party. There's the pious cashier at the Roxborough and Castleford bank, you know; goes to church three times every Sunday—cold dinner at one o'clock, and prayers in the evening; he's the

sort of party for a neat little forgery. I'm a reprobate, I am; and I ain't up to the embezzlement dodge."

"Oh, very well," answered Mr. Catheron; "I daresay something else will turn up. Twopenny-Postman sha'n't run without my having a few pounds upon him, if there's money to be got in Castleford. Say no more about it."

"I ain't going to," replied Mr. Dobb, with an energetic disregard of grammatical rule.

The two men turned, and walked silently towards the noisy group, who had gathered round a gipsy tea-kettle, and were winding up the entertainment with what Mrs. Dobb called a comfortable cup of tea, but what, upon the part of the gentlemen, seemed to be a comfortable glass of any thing that was to be had in the way of spirituous liquor. The lieutenant accepted a glass of brandy-and-water very sulkily, and then stood above the gipsy-fire smoking moodily, with the red light of the burning wood flickering on his face. Dorothy watched him sadly. He took so little notice of her. His thoughts seemed so far away

from her. Oh, dear, what a painful passion this love was!

The Dobbites took their places in the omnibus by and by, with a great deal less ceremony and a great deal more skirmishing than had attended that operation in the morning. Some of the gentlemen were wildly gay, while others seemed possessed by a morbid melancholy. Some were slightly inclined to be captious, and others gave unmistakable evidence of a quarrelsome tendency. Some of the ladies were ill, and some were noisy. Mrs. Smith complained of the veal-pie lying heavy on her chest; and Mrs. Spinner insisted on riding outside, and singing a Swiss song, with a "La, ou, a," that was like the premonitory symptoms of seasickness, and was openly slapped by the scandalised Spinner. Dorothy rode outside, with Gervoise Catheron's sheltering arm surrounding her plump shoulders, and keeping off the cold; and, oh, all the disappointment of the day was amply recompensed by that delicious drive through the cool night-air, with a million golden stars above, and a beautiful shadowy landscape flitting by like

a dream below. What did it matter that Mr. and Mrs. Spinner were quarrelling all the time? What did it matter that the vehicle had to be stopped more than once to obtain drams with a view to the settlement of that veal-pie on Mrs. Smith's chest, or that Henry Adolphus made the night hideous with comic songs? What did it matter that the party baited at roadside inns where rough men and boys came out to stare at them, as if they had been a show; or that they went whooping through drowsy little villages, where the lights were twinkling dimly in bedroom-windows, and where scared villagers peered from their casements as at a troop of noisy demons? What did any thing matter? Her lover was by her side; and life was beautiful.

Gervoise Catheron parted sulkily from his friend the brewer's-clerk, declining to enter that gentleman's hospitable mansion, although Dorothy begged him to do so; for she was to sleep in her cousin's spare room, and had looked forward to the delight of an evening which would not be broken by her early departure. He left the party

immediately after assisting Dorothy to alight, and went back to his quarters alone. But he saw Mr. Dobb in Castleford the next day, and again the day after that; and he had a long talk with him in his office on the following day; and by that night's post money-orders for a considerable amount went up to Mr. Catheron's friend in London, to be hazarded on the fortunes of Twopenny-Postman, half in the name of the lieutenant, half in the name of the clerk.

And in the bosom of his family that night Mr. Dobb was dull and gloomy, while his faint attempts at the facetious had a ghastly air that struck terror to the tender heart of his devoted partner.

CHAPTER II.

MARCIA'S FESTIVAL.

THE widow arrived at the Abbey a day or two after the picnic on Lemley Hills, and once more Sir Jasper was gratified by the sight of that superb matron. She was looking her best, and seemed in very high spirits. The open carriage that had brought her from Roxborough station had passed the deserted Hermitage, and at sight of the closed shutters Mrs. Harding had leaned forward to speak to the servant sitting next the coachman.

"Has Mr.—Mr.—Pauncefort left Scarsdale?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"For good?"

"I believe so, ma'am."

The warm carnation of the widow's cheek

deepened, and a bright flash of triumph illumined her eyes with a more vivid light than that which she imparted to them by the application of belladonna.

"The bolder game is always wisest," she thought. "I was half inclined to write and ask Marcia if he was still here; but that would have looked bad, and Miss Denison is very artful. Those quiet people always are artful."

She awakened from this reverie to find herself at the foot of the broad stone stairs leading to the terrace, where Sir Jasper and his daughter awaited her coming; and in the next moment she was embracing her darling Marcia with more than ordinary effusion.

"And looking so well too, you sweet pet," she murmured fondly; "and dear Sir Jasper looks younger than ever. Ah, if you would only tell *me* your secret! I really should like to know how you manage it," she added archly, shaking the plumes in her dazzling bonnet coquettishly as she addressed the Baronet.

He liked it. Alas for human weakness! He

knew that she was false and hollow, the most cindery and bitter of all the fruits that ever flourished on the shores of falsehood's Dead Sea; he knew that she would have bartered her soul for any of the sordid prizes earth has to give; he knew the shallow mysteries of her mind and soul almost as fully as if he had known every secret of her life; and yet he liked her for the sake of her colour and brightness, the gaudy beauty of her face, the harmonious lines of her figure. He liked her as we like a gorgeous tropical bird, which we caress cautiously with an uncertain hand, knowing that at any moment its cruel beak may close on the fingers that are fondling it.

From the hour of the widow's arrival Marcia resigned her place as her father's companion. There are daughters who will bring to bear the patient diplomacy of a female Talleyrand against such an interloper as Mrs. Harding; but Miss Denison was quite incapable of protecting her position by any thing in the way of artifice. As she had been content to stand aside forgotten and neglected in her childhood, while her father's love

was given to a brighter rival, so was she contented to resign him now if he pleased to bestow the shallower sentiments of his empty heart upon this bold handsome stranger. For his own sake she regretted his predilection for the widow, and was prepared to expostulate with him openly on his folly if she could find the occasion for so doing without overstepping the limits of her duty as his daughter. For herself—ah, how completely all interests and affections of hers were submerged in the tide of her life's one passion! She could think of a separation from her father without a pang—she could resign herself to a lonely, desolate future without a tear. All minor sorrows were absorbed in the one mighty grief of her life, as all minor affections were merged in the one great love.

And she could feel all this, and yet endure her existence and take her place at the breakfast-table every morning, and attend to her simple domestic duties, never once letting the urn overflow the table-cloth, or putting a grain of superfluous sugar in her father's tea. Surely there

is something heroic in the quiet endurance of these drawing-room martyrs, who cover their *stigmata* with cambric and lace, and smile conventional smiles, and talk conventional talk while the wounds are still bleeding.

How many mornings Marcia Denison had discussed the aspect of the sky and the contents of the post-bag with the same polite interest in her father's conversation, while her mind was filled with the memory of some cruel dream in which she had seen *him*—ill, or wounded, or dying, or in danger—while an unseen influence had held her spell-bound and powerless to help him! And now that the widow had returned, poor Marcia had to endure the slow torture of a lively companion, and the prying gaze of eyes that had graduated in every school where worldly wisdom is to be learned.

"She may worm herself into my father's confidence and trade upon the weakest attributes of his character; but she shall never read my secrets or insult my sorrow by her mock sympathy," thought Miss Denison, after resist-

ing one of the widow's most artfully-planned attacks.

And she did baffle Mrs. Harding most completely. The gushing Blanche could make nothing out of this cold proud woman, who kept her at bay with such chilling politeness. Whether she had an enemy in Marcia—an enemy who would interfere to frustrate her schemes—or whether the girl's proud bearing only masked a great sorrow, was a question which Mrs. Harding was not able to decide. But she would have felt more comfortable if Sir Jasper's daughter had been a different sort of person. She was prepared to meet with opposition in the path that led to the winning of the prize she had set herself to obtain. She was prepared to play the common game of check and counter-check, to outscheme a schemer: but the non-resistant force of a person whose manner is hostile, and whose action is neutral, is not very easy to cope withal. If Miss Denison had seemed friendly, the widow would have been happy: but that lady was too well versed in the expression of a face or the tones of a voice not

to know that Miss Denison disliked her. Knowing this, she would fain have had Marcia out in the open field of antagonism, and have done battle for the prize she coveted. Marcia's manner mystified her: and when she was brightest and most bewitching, flushed and triumphant with the consciousness of having tightened the coils of her shadowy network around her victim, the terror of Sir Jasper's daughter sent an icy shiver through her false heart, and she grew pale and sick with the fear of some crushing blow from the hand that had so long been idle, as if drawn back in readiness for the fatal stroke.

"She knows something about me," thought the widow, when she brooded over Marcia's chilling manner. "*He* told her, of course: not the truth, but quite enough to ruin me. He would be likely to tell her every thing before he went away: for I know he had fallen in love with her pale face and her grand manner: and he did the heroic, I suppose, at last, and made a clean breast of it. And my lady is hoarding her secret until she sees her father ready to make me Lady Denison,

and then she will step forward and denounce me. She looks just the sort of woman to do such a thing as that."

The widow, standing by her bedroom-window in the moonlight, with her long black hair falling in an undulating snake-like line upon her white dressing-gown, looked "just the sort of woman" to do any dark deed that was ever done by female hands, and not to be sorry for it afterwards. She had disliked Marcia from the very first hour of their acquaintance, with the instinctive aversion which a thoroughly wicked woman generally feels for a very good one: but her hatred had grown murderous of late, since she had become possessed with the idea that Marcia would be able to overthrow all her plans in the very hour of her triumph.

Some of the greatest mistakes of life arise from the fact that people generally base all their arguments respecting the conduct and motives of others upon their knowledge of themselves. Mrs. Harding was so complete a schemer that she could only see in Marcia's apparent neutrality the policy

of a still deeper diplomatist. She saw that Sir Jasper's daughter stood aside and allowed her to spread her airy nets and prepare her dainty nooses, and feather her delicate flies, and angle as she pleased for her mighty fish, or lay what snares she would for her bird of golden plumage, and yet she could not give the girl credit for being simply too proud and high-minded to stoop to any underhand interference. The more entirely Marcia stood aloof, the more profound grew the widow's belief in her power to shatter all the fabric of her airy castle. She fancied Marcia doing what she would have enjoyed doing herself, crouching cat-like until the moment for the fatal spring. In a poem of these latter days—a poem which is like a picture by Landseer done into printer's ink, and which the great animal-painter might well choose as a subject for his marvellous pencil—it has been suggested that Cleopatra began life as a tigress, gamboling on the yellow sands of an untrodden shore, and prowling in the trackless depths of a primeval forest. It would have been easy for any one who studied Mrs. Harding to imagine that she

had spent the dawn of her existence in the guise of a cat; not a sleepy, contented, domestic animal, but a sleek brindled rat-hunter, a Nimrod of dark sewers and foul underground labyrinths, a stealthy prowling destroyer, a ruthless green-eyed devourer of mean and loathsome prey.

It had been a custom at Scarsdale to give some entertainment to the neighbouring school-children every summer or autumn, whether the family was at the Abbey or not. The usual time for this festival had drifted by; for Marcia had been utterly depressed in body and mind after that stormy interview in the Hermitage, and had deferred from day to day the effort necessary for the organisation of the entertainment. But she would no more have disappointed her young pensioners than she would have broken the most solemn promise ever made; and she held a solemn council with Mrs. Browning and the curate, Mr. Silbrook, almost immediately after the fascinating widow's arrival. Mrs. Harding's visit had not been without its benefit for Marcia, disagreeable

though her presence might be. The widow's society acted as a kind of irritant, and aroused Sir Jasper's daughter from the dull lethargy into which her mind had sunk after Godfrey Pierrepoint's departure. Mr. Silbrook attended Marcia's summons with rapture, and presented himself in the yellow drawing-room, where Miss Denison and the widow were seated as far apart as politeness would permit. Marcia was busied in the cutting-out of comfortable woollen garments for her poor; while Dorothy sat meekly by, sewing with a clever rapid hand, in which the needle twinkled every now and then as it shot upward into the sunshine. Mrs. Harding had been so gushingly anxious for a morning's chat with her dearest Marcia, that Miss Denison had been fain to bring her work-basket to the drawing-room.

"But Dorothy is accustomed to work with me," she had said; "and I scarcely know how I shall get on without her."

"Then pray bring Dorothy, my sweet Marcia," exclaimed Mrs. Harding. "You surely cannot think that I am too proud to accept the com-

panionship that pleases you. Besides, I have taken quite a fancy to dear little Dorothy. Who is it has talked about 'surprised blue eyes'? Some poet, I think. Dorothy's big brown eyes have a look of astonishment sometimes that is really charming."

So this is how Dorothy came to be established in the yellow drawing-room, seated modestly on a footstool, with her brown curls just on a level with Marcia's work-table,—below the salt, as it were. Miss Denison was very glad to have her faithful little companion seated at her feet on this particular morning; for Dorothy's presence would be likely to ward off any thing in the way of confidential conversation; and Marcia had a horror of any confidence arising between herself and this bold, scheming, false-tongued woman, who had traduced Godfrey Pierrepoint.

Mr. Silbrook was announced presently; and the widow became deeply interested in the object of his visit. If the entertainment of charity-children had been the most novel or soul-absorbing amusement that ever aroused feminine enthu-

siasm, Mrs. Harding could scarcely have been more enthusiastic than she was.

"The dear children—what happiness to give them pleasure; and how noble of dear sweet Marcia to think of taking so much trouble!" cried the widow, with more warmth of expression than soundness of logic: and then she listened with an air of rapture while Miss Denison and the curate discussed the arrangement of the festival; the hour for dinner in a tent on the lawn; the gipsy-tea in a grassy circle in the wood—a circle which the country-people called the fairy ring, and close to which rustic spot there was a broad babbling brook, and a tiny waterfall that trickled over moss-grown stones and lost its way amid the rank luxuriance of fern.

Mrs. Harding was charmed with these arrangements, but ventured to offer little propositions of her own, in the way of tiny white tents, festooned with pink cambric roses, in which the village-children might have curds-and-whey and pound-cake, and syllabub and tarts, and all

manner of bilious refreshments: or might not the children be dressed in fancy costume, she asked—some of them as dryads or hamadryads, or whatever you called the quaint classical creatures; and some as little Redriding Hoods, and Swiss peasants, and Spanish gipsies? It would be so sweet and picturesque, and the very thing to please dear Sir Jasper. And she would be so happy to assist in carrying out the little scheme: for though so stupidly ignorant of all sorts of plain needlework such as dear Marcia excelled in, she had a kind of talent, she ventured to say, for the arrangement of a medieval quadrille, or *tableaux vivants*, or any thing picturesque in that way.

"And *apropos* to *tableaux vivants*," exclaimed the widow, "why should we not get up something in that way, as a surprise for dear Sir Jasper? Some pretty silvan scene—Rosalind and Celia—a little series of pictures from *As you like It*. If Mr. Silbrook would only do Jaques!" cried Mrs. Harding, clasping her hands, and overwhelming the curate with con-

fusion" by her sudden address. "I do think Mr. Silbrook is the very man for Jaques—just the mild contemplative expression," she added, gazing critically at the unhappy young man, who felt his complexion changing to the dreadful hue of a newly-boiled lobster. "Don't you think so, now, Marcia?"

Miss Denison, compassionately conscious of the timid curate's embarrassment, bent over her work as she murmured that she had seen a person who reminded her more vividly of the pensive exile; and then, after politely negativing Mrs. Harding's propositions, she went on to complete the plan of the children's day.

"Then at twelve o'clock on the fifteenth we shall expect the arrival of the vans," said Marcia; "and there will be a distribution of cake and sweet wine in one of the tents. After that we will have games in the Park until two; at two dinner; and after dinner more games, I suppose, until tea-time. Six o'clock, I think, we had better say for tea; and after tea it will be almost time for the children from the distant vil-

lages to think about the journey home. I have engaged the Roxborough town-band, and I have written to a person in London for a magic-lantern, to be shown in the servants' hall, which can be darkened for the purpose. I'll send one of the grooms into Roxborough this afternoon, to make arrangements about the vans; and if you will settle matters with the teachers, Mr. Silbrook, I think we shall manage very well."

A confused mumbling, which might mean any thing or nothing, was the only utterance which that unhappy young man could give to his overpowering sense of Marcia Denison's goodness. He gazed upon her in a rapture of admiring love; and yet his pale-blue eyes expressed only weakness. His heart was thrilled to the very core with a rapturous emotion in her presence, and yet he could not accomplish the most commonplace sentence without ignominious stuttering and hesitation. Oh, pity them, those unhappy souls who lack the power of utterance! The sculptor has his marble, the architect his palace, the writer his book, the painter his can-

vain, in which to give utterance, more or less fully, to the deep yearnings of his soul. But how much to be pitied are those hapless creatures whom nature has deprived of that grandest of all gifts, the power of expression; who look piteously into the faces of their fellow-men, and see themselves despised by men to whom they know themselves superior; who see themselves pushed aside by vulgar charlatans, and are yet possessed of knowledge that would put charlatanism to shame! Pity the mute Milton who dies inglorious for lack of some minor force, without which the great gift of poetry is powerless to reveal itself; the sculptor who, with the genius of a Michael Angelo, shrinks back to oblivion aghast and disheartened by the first ruthless sneer of an ignorant critic. Pity—above all blighted creatures doomed to bear the burden of earthly sorrow—the men and women *who might have been great.* And second only to these in the roll of martyrdom are the men and women who have loved devotedly, and have never dared to reveal their passion.

Mr. Silbrook rose to depart presently, after having declined an invitation to a luncheon that would have been to him as a banquet eaten amidst the citron-groves of Milton's paradise. He was moving towards the door, twisting his hat hopelessly in his warm nervous hands, and murmuring unintelligible adieux; but instead of ringing the bell for the servant, Marcia rose and pointed to one of the open windows.

"If you will go by the terrace, Mr. Silbrook, I will show you my china asters," she said.

The curate made his way across the room in a little hesitating scamper, and in the next minute found himself on the terrace, standing by Marcia's side: alone—with her.

And she had asked him to come out there, alone! She had something to say to him—something that could not be said before that gorgeous person who had put him to shame in the drawing-room. He felt his heart beating like the pumping of an engine; he felt his knees dissolving into jelly, and his legs giving way under him. The hot blood surged up into his head, and made his

eyes weaker than ever. A mist swam before them. Was he going blind, or mad—or both? He had a vague recollection of a wonderful poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning called *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*—a poem in which a grand lady asks a peasant-born poet to be her husband. He had a still more shadowy recollection of a dozen different novels, in which loveliness and wealth had stooped to bless the humble adorer. And he loved her so dearly, so fondly, so truly. How could she be ignorant of such unselfish devotion, or blind to such patient worship? She knew the secrets of his timid heart, and she was about to reward him by stooping from her high station, to tell him that his love was not hopeless.

Winstanley Silbrook had time enough to think this while Marcia strolled by his side to the end of the terrace, below which blazed the gorgeous colouring of nature in the shape of a parterre of china asters.

"Are they not very fine?" asked Marcia, pointing to the flowers.

The curate, short-sighted always, was dimmer

of vision than usual to-day. He saw confused splashes of gaudy colour blazing in the sunshine; and murmured his admiration. But the pumping of the engine still went on under his clerical waistcoat, and he wondered how Marcia was going to approach the subject of this thrilling interview.

"I thought you would admire our show of autumn flowers," said Miss Denison, as they went down the broad flight of steps into the stiff Italian garden; "but I had another motive for asking you to come this way." The engine pumped more furiously than ever; and the curate began to think that he must ask his divinity for a glass of water, or else give up the ghost and swoon quietly on the smooth gravelled mall. "I wish to say something that I did not care to say before Mrs. Harding or Dorothy. Do you remember telling me last Christmas of the anonymous donations dropped into the Scarsdale poor-box?"

The engine left off pumping all at once; and that sudden stoppage seemed more painful than all the furious action of the past five minutes. The curate turned deadly white, and a faint sick

feeling crept over him. In the next minute he recovered himself. What a fool he had been! "As if she could care for me—or notice my feelings," he thought, in piteous self-abasement.

"Do you remember?" asked Marcia.

"Yes, yes; oh yes, perfectly."

"Have the donations been continued since then?"

"Until last July—yes. Before July they were very irregular; since that time the donations in the box have ceased; but only a week ago I received fifty pounds in notes for the poor of Scarsdale, and it is very probable that the gift comes from the same benefactor. I think I have the envelope in my pocket. Perhaps you would like to see it?"

"If you please."

The curate searched for the document. To say that he produced half-a-dozen different papers—a receipted washing-bill, a bootmaker's account, a letter from his grandmother, a little evangelical tract, and so on—before he possessed himself of the paper he wanted, is only to say that he com-

ported himself after the manner of a nervous and hyper-sensitive person. He found the envelope at last, and handed it to Marcia.

Yes, it was *his* hand, as she had expected. Stiff and disguised, but still Godfrey Pierrepoint's hand—the only hand which could by no possibility be disguised from her. The envelope was half covered with foreign stamps; and the post-mark was Vienna. He had not left Europe, then. It seemed as if he were quite close at hand at Vienna. How clear it all seemed now; and how natural that he who had visited so much amongst the poor, and had listened so patiently to their stories of want and trouble, should have been their anonymous benefactor all the time; too proud to take any credit for his bounties; content to incur the hazard of being misjudged by the people who profited by his generosity!

Marcia returned the envelope to Mr. Silbrook.

"I think you must have acted very wisely with regard to the disposal of the money," she said, "or your anonymous friend would have scarcely continued his donations."

The curate blushed, and a sickly smile flickered over his inexpressive countenance. Even this little bit of praise from her was a crumb of comfort. "I did my best, Miss Denison," he answered very humbly. "I am a great deal among the Scarsdale poor, and I know their little wants. I have not many pleasures, and I assure you the disposal of that money has been a very great pleasure to me."

"Has it really? Then will you let me give you another fifty pounds to dispose of in the same manner?" asked Marcia, who felt somehow that to duplicate Godfrey Pierrepoint's gift would be in some manner to associate herself with his secret charity.

"You are too good, Miss Denison, but indeed it is not needed. I have more than twenty pounds of the anonymous fund still in hand. I keep that money apart from all other funds, and I have a little book in which I enter all outgoings. Perhaps you would like to see my book. I venture to hope that a great deal of good has been done, under Providence, by the aid of that money. David Green's family have had an allowance of

ten shillings a-week ever since David was laid up; he's beginning to get round a little now, and I assure you he and his people are very grateful for having been carried over their troubles without going to the parish. Widow Morris has had three pounds ten towards the purchase of a mangle, and she seems to be doing very nicely now; and the children attend school regularly instead of working in the fields, as they did before, for sixpence a-day. Margery Holmes had five pounds for clothes to enable her to get out to service; but that was put more in the way of a loan, and we expect Margery to repay us by easy instalments: and Susan West—who—who, you may remember, some time since—to have heard—or perhaps I ought not to mention it in your presence, and yet as a Christian minister—I—the unhappy girl being —I assure you—most penitent—and, although I perhaps have no right to allude—yet the recollection of the—the—blessed words with relation to those who are without sin, and those only, having the right to cast a stone—I have ven-

tured on advancing a little money to send her up to a most admirable institution in the metropolis—though I regret to say rather Puseyite in its tendencies—where she will be qualified as a sick-nurse, and will, I hope, be given opportunities of real usefulness. But I'll bring you my book the next time I—I have the pleasure of calling, Miss Denison; and any advice you may kindly have to offer, I—need scarcely say —er—I shall make a—per—point—"

Here the subject became in a manner personal, and the curate broke down. But Marcia was very kind to him, and promised to give him her best thoughts with regard to the anonymous donations, if he had any need of her advice, and additional help whenever he wanted help. She accompanied the curate to the little gate opening from the Italian garden into the Park, and shook hands with him very cordially as she wished him good-bye. She liked him for his goodness and his modesty, and she had not the faintest suspicion of the troubled state of his poor honest heart.

She went slowly back to the drawing-room, for it had been some comfort to her to escape so long from the widow. And in the mean time that vivacious personage had been making the best use of her opportunity, and had subjected poor innocent little Dorothy to a protracted operation of that kind which is commonly called "pumping."

Was dear Miss Denison always so bright and industrious? Did not dear Miss Denison sometimes find herself very dull and lonely? Had not dear Miss Denison very much missed her papa's friend Mr. Pauncefort? Were not Mr. Pauncefort and dear Miss Denison very intimate?

Dorothy shook her head till the crisp brown curls danced again.

No; Miss Denison was never dull or lonely, but always had so much to employ her—drawing, and practising, and reading; oh, reading so very, very much. And Miss Denison had seen scarcely any thing of Mr. Pauncefort since Mrs. Harding's last visit; and Dorothy was quite sure she did not miss him a bit.

The widow grew thoughtful after obtaining this information. She had been picking up beads on the point of her needle while she had talked to Dorothy for the decoration of a very gorgeous pair of slippers which she was embroidering for Sir Jasper; and now she sat pushing her needle dreamily about among the glittering atoms of glass, ruminating upon what she had heard.

If Marcia's intimacy with Godfrey Pierrepoint had made no advance since the spring, was it likely that he would have told her the secrets of his life? It was very possible that Marcia knew nothing, after all, and in that case she was powerless to frustrate the widow's schemes.

"I will try and think she knows nothing, at any rate," thought the widow; "I can effect nothing by a timid policy; and if I fail—I fail. I am not playing quite so desperate a game as Lady Macbeth; and even she was willing to abide the issue."

CHAPTER III.

GENTLEMANLY CHANTAGE.

THE morning sunshine on the fifteenth of September promised fairly for the adventurous spirits who hurried northward behind rushing railway engines, and those still more enthusiastic votaries of the turf who paid their nightly guineas for uncomfortable beds in the sleepy little town of Doncaster, broad awake only for this one autumn week in all the year. The little northern town was bright in the sunshine, flags fluttered in the cool fresh breezes, the vendors of toothsome butterscotch were blithe and busy, and the noise of many tongues sounded on the morning air. Between the town and the race-course there was one throng of pushing pedestrians, who took possession of the high-road, and defied the boldest of charioteers or the most desperate of postillions.

How many of those men would go back the same way in the dusky evening gloomy and crestfallen, was a question which no one cared to ask himself at that early stage of the day's business. Every man in the crowd pushed onward as cheerily as if he had been going to certain fortune.

But if the bright autumn weather afforded satisfaction to those world-worn votaries of the turf who had waded knee-deep in the mud and slush of the Knavesmire, and tramped on Epsom Downs when that broad open country was no better walking than a ploughed field; who had stood in the blinding rain to see the settlement of a dead-heat between two favourites, and had held their places in the ring when the thunder shook the ground under their feet, and the lightning flashed into their eyes until they could scarcely see the figures in their betting-books,—if to such men as these a fine day were matter for rejoicing, what was it to the village children who were to enjoy Miss Denison's festival? A great many pairs of innocent eyes kept watch for that September dawn; a great many guileless hearts beat

happily at sight of that faint glow of yellow light in the east, which brightened as the day grew older.

As the clock in Sir Jasper's study struck twelve, the bells of Scarsdale church struck up a merry peal, and a chorus of shrill voices sounded on the lawn. The Baronet shuddered, and turned with a deprecating gesture to Mrs. Harding, who stood by the open window, arrayed in the freshest of peach-coloured muslins, and the most innocent of Leghorn bonnets.

"Agreeable, isn't it, ma'am?" said Sir Jasper. "This is what comes of having a philanthropic daughter. I hope you are not philanthropic, Mrs. Harding."

The widow simpered. "I fear I am not nearly so good as Miss Denison; and I only wish I were more like your sweet daughter," she said; "and yet even poor I cannot help feeling some pleasure in witnessing the innocent happiness of my fellow-creatures."

"Don't be good, Mrs. Harding," cried the Baronet; "if you wish to remain fascinating,

don't be good. I don't know why the two things should be incompatible, but I have always found them so. It is an unhappy fact, but the people who have left their mark upon the world have not been what is generally called good people. How many times will you hear Richard Brinsley Sheridan's name for every time you hear the names of John Howard or William Penn? See how we talk of Swift and Sterne, Chesterfield and Walpole, the Prince Regent and Lord Byron. But who ever talks of Captain Coram or Elizabeth Fry? The verses which Oliver Goldsmith wrote about the village parson will live for ever; but who remembers the parson himself? For one person who knows any thing about St. Augustine, fifty are familiar with the most insignificant details in the life of Voltaire, from the time when he was beaten before the face of mankind by De Rohan's lacqueys, to the day when he was spilt out of a postchaise with Madame de Chatelet and her bandboxes; and he endured it all with the same noble calm—the beating, the bandboxes, and the fascinating vixenish blue-stocking. Wonder-

ful man! Is it strange that we admire him? No, Mrs. Harding, it is very sad; but the biographies of the wicked people are infinitely more diverting than the lives of saints and philanthropists. But go, Mrs. Harding; be happy with Marcia's charity-children, and forget me."

The widow executed that little manœuvre, which was almost as good as blushing, and murmured that Sir Jasper's conversation was more delightful to her than any rustic festivity that was ever devised since that illustrious period which Watteau has made familiar to us, when the upper ten thousand seem to have devoted their leisure to sitting on the grass, drinking champagne out of tall slender glasses, and dancing minuets in broad daylight to the accompaniment of an amateur violinist.

"If I could tempt you to come out upon the terrace," pleaded the widow, "I really think the air would do you good."

Sir Jasper hesitated a little, looked at his beloved fire, and then at the blue bright sky, and then at his magnificent visitor.

"I really think I will," he said. "The imprudence may cost me my life; but, so tempted, the wisest man might peril his paltry existence. I'll ring for an overcoat, and join you."

It was an understood thing that the Baronet was an invalid, and always must be an invalid; and no one ventured to breathe a suspicion that he had nothing whatever the matter with him. But there were many who did suspect that fact nevertheless, and amongst these infidels was the country surgeon who attended him.

The Baronet had abandoned his dressing-gown for a civilised morning-dress since the widow's arrival, but he still enjoyed all those little privileges which only an invalid can claim without offence. The most comfortable easy-chairs, and the cosiest corners of the room, were sacred to Sir Jasper. If Sir Jasper's visitor rose to leave the room, Sir Jasper was not expected to spring from his chair and intercept her steps in order to open the door. If he felt inclined to shirk the trouble of dressing for dinner, a little languid shiver and faintly-plaintive sigh, or the remark

that he was a shade worse than usual, were all-sufficient to excuse his breach of etiquette. If he wanted a nap after dinner, he took it without disguise; and his slumbers were soothed by the hushed murmurs of the widow, who observed to her sweet Marcia that it was so delightful to see her dear papa getting a little rest. The indignation of the county families excluded from friendly intercourse with their neighbour was in some measure appeased when they were informed that poor Sir Jasper Denison was much the same as usual —neither better nor worse.

And in the mean time the Sybarite read his favourite books, and sipped his most ethereal hocks out of fragile glasses that might have been manufactured by fairy glass-blowers; and every one around and about him bowed down to him and did him homage.

He strolled upon the terrace with Mrs. Harding, while Marcia and the curate and half-a-dozen teachers and all the household of the Abbey were busy with the great event of the day. The widow made herself supremely delightful, and Sir Jasper

quaffed deeply from the Circean chalice. He liked it—he liked it! He knew that she was more or less false, perhaps even worthless; he knew that her silence on the subject of her antecedents was terribly ominous; he knew that she had been denounced, by a man whom he instinctively believed, as a runaway wife, a heartless and cruel mother; and yet the caressing sound of her voice, the subtle flatteries involved in her conversation, the charm of her splendid beauty, the style of her perfect dress, all these things were very delightful to him; and as he loitered by her side on the bright sunny terrace, he was pondering the possibility of securing these pleasures to himself for ever.

A man does not read Voltaire for nothing. The inveterate *persifleur* is the most unprincipled of creatures. Can any thing upon earth be really sacred, can any thing on earth or in heaven possess any solemn significance, for the man who makes himself and his own pleasure the centre of the universe?

"I don't suppose she is a good woman," mused Sir Jasper, following out the thesis he had started

in his conversation with the widow; "and there must be something rather queer about her marriage with that fellow Harding, or she would scarcely be so very close about it. But if I like her, and can marry her, am I to deprive myself of the pleasure of her society because she is a little reserved about her antecedents? Cleopatra had been carried in a bundle to Cæsar before her galley sailed down the Cydnus to meet Mark Antony; and Louis the Well-beloved succeeded Sainte Foy in the affections of beautiful Mademoiselle Lange (otherwise Marie-Jeanne Gomard Vaubernier), very much as he succeeded Pharamond upon the throne of France. There are people who will call me a fool, I daresay, if I marry the delightful widow; but shall I be any the worse for being called a fool? I was called a fool when I gave three hundred guineas for my Psyche; but the picture will sell at Christie's for a thousand when I am dead. Why should I not please myself in the choice of a wife as well as in the selection of a picture? And Marcia—— But of course Marcia will marry sooner or later, though I fear all this

anxiety about charity-children is rather a diagnostic of approaching old-maidism."

Something to this effect ran the musings of the Baronet while he dawdled by Mrs. Harding's side in as dreamy a state of mind as if he had been chewing the cud of a repast of lotuses, or, as the grammarians would have it, *loti*. He was very far removed from that noble security of purpose in which he had quoted his *Pickwick*, and laughed to scorn the dangerous machinations of this elegant Mrs. Bardell. Mrs. Bardell had been absent from him, and life without Bardell had seemed very dreary. She had taught him to understand her value, and he had missed the brightness of her full-blown beauty as he would have missed his finest Etty, if the picture had been taken away and only a dismal blank patch of empty wall left in its place. The thought of losing her again—losing her for ever perhaps, by reason of her going away and fascinating some other elderly baronet—was very terrible to him. He did not want to marry her. He was a great deal too selfish to wish to do any thing that involved trouble,

or might bring down ridicule upon himself; but he wanted to secure her; he wanted to be sole proprietor of that soft caressing voice, those undulating and graceful, not to say cat-like movements, and all the life and colour of that somewhat florid beauty.

"There might be times when I should find her a nuisance," thought the Baronet. "Even one's dearest friend is apt to degenerate into a nuisance. I daresay Orestes was often bored by Pylades, and Damon occasionally weary of Pythias, and Socrates tired of Plato, and Pope disgusted with Bolingbroke, and Lamb heartily sick of Coleridge. But I could send her to the seaside for change of air, or pack her off on a round of visits, or get rid of her in some equally civil manner. She would be mine—my goods, my chattels, my house, my household stuff, my field, my barn; and it's not likely I should allow her to become a nuisance."

The great clock in the stable-tower struck two while Sir Jasper and the widow still loitered on the terrace; and Marcia joined them presently,

looking very bright and pretty, with a flush upon her cheeks. It is quite impossible to make other people happy without being somewhat infected by their happiness. A great shout rose above the trees in the Park as Marcia appeared upon the terrace-steps.

"I've not seen such nice feeling in your face for the last six months, my dear," murmured the Baronet as he greeted his daughter.

"They are just sitting down to dinner, papa," said Miss Denison. "They were to give three cheers for you, the teachers told me, before grace was said. The tables are charmingly decorated, and really that dear good Mrs. Browning and all the servants have done wonders. I only wish you had been in the great marquee just now, papa. Browning and I peeped in at the children through an opening at the back. You never saw so many happy faces. You have really lost a treat."

"Never mind, my love," returned the Baronet languidly; "I don't much care for that class of subjects. Wilkie did some very nice things in that way; and that sort of thing engraves very

well, and is sure to be popular in second-rate inn-parlours and furnished apartments at the seaside. I am very glad your young *protégés* are enjoying themselves, my dear, since their enjoyment is gratifying to you; but if you think that I could derive any pleasure from hearing myself shouted at three-times-three and a little one in, or any thing of that kind—or from the appalling spectacle of two or three hundred voracious children gorging themselves with very red beef—though why it should always be underdone on these occasions is a mystery I have never yet been able to fathom,—if you think any thing of that kind could give me pleasure, you have a meaner opinion of me than I should have imagined it possible for you to have."

Of course Mrs. Harding was enthusiastic about the dear children, but she took care to keep her enthusiasm within bounds; for it was the taste of Sir Jasper she had to consult rather than that of Miss Denison, whom it seemed so very hard a task to conciliate.

The Baronet accompanied the ladies to the

dining-room, or rather to that cosey wainscoted apartment in which he always dined; for the dining-room at Scarsdale was an appalling apartment, as large as a moderate-sized church, and hung with smoky-looking family-portraits, in which here a ghastly face and there a pallid arm or a bony hand appeared out of a background of darkness. Some of the pictures were supposed to be very fine, and *connoisseurs* went into raptures about the concentration of light here, and the marvellous truthfulness of texture, or the wonderful fidelity of detail there, and the extraordinary depth of tone every where. But Sir Jasper shrugged his shoulders, and made light of the family Holbeins and Vandykes.

"Holbein was a very great person, and there is a small portrait of an old Dutch fellow at Dulwich which is a marvel of realistic painting," said the Baronet; "but then I don't care for realistic painting. Give me the creator, and not the man who is only a draughtsman. Give me the poet from whose enchanted brush every object derives sublimation. My Etty used to invest his com-

monest models with the divinity of grace. He never painted what he saw—he painted what he felt; and the students in the life Academy wondered as they looked over his shoulder and compared the creature on his canvas with the faded model. You cannot get goddesses for a shilling an hour. The divinity must be in the painter's mind. Since Queensberry will not unveil her patrician loveliness, the painter must lend the grace of the duchess to the handmaid who serves as a model for his Helen. I don't believe Etty ever saw the original of my Psyche except in his inspired dreams. I don't believe Rome ever looked as glorious as Turner has painted her."

The Baronet trifled with his airy biscuit and sipped his goblet of Vichy water and pale sherry while the two ladies took their luncheon. He was in a particularly amiable temper, and inclined to be gracious to every one to-day. So far as it was in him to feel so romantic a sentiment, Sir Jasper Denison was in love. He could scarcely admit the fact even to himself; for it seemed such a pitiful climax to his philosophy. But he found

himself basking in the sunshine of Mrs. Harding's smiles, and he was dimly conscious that his feelings were more juvenile than his arguments.

After luncheon they went back to the terrace, whither the widow with her own hands carried a light basket-work chair for Sir Jasper's accommodation. Nor was she content with that attention; she went backwards and forwards to fetch a footstool, and sofa-pillows, and a tiger-skin rug, and behaved very much as she might have done if her host had been in the last stage of consumption.

He liked it. Yes, unhappily Sir Jasper liked all this undisguised feminine homage. He liked to see the dark handsome head bent before him, while the jewelled hands arranged a footstool beneath his feet. He was an invalid, and any thing of this kind was permissible because he was an invalid.

"I shall never be more than a shade better as long as I live," he thought, as Mrs. Harding arranged his pillows; and once when Marcia was not looking, he bent his head over the busy fingers and touched them lightly with his lips.

This time the widow really did blush, and the blush was visible through the delicate simulated bloom.

"I shall be Lady Denison before I die," she thought, "if *she* knows nothing." Her eyes shot a furtive glance at Marcia, and her face darkened as she looked that way.

Marcia went back to her curate and her teachers and her children presently, and the Baronet and the widow were left alone. Mrs. Harding posed herself in an exquisite attitude—she had a charming selection of attitudes copied from the finest models in foreign galleries. She stood a few paces from Sir Jasper's chair, leaning half listlessly against one of the marble vases on the balustrade, with her elbow resting on the broad lip of the vase, her head supported by her hand, and her profile in full relief. She was at an age when a handsome woman's profile is apt to be handsomer than her full face.

There is no need to follow the conversation of these two. The widow had a talent for drifting pleasantly after her companion rather than

for leading a conversation. Whatever Sir Jasper said seemed to interest her as profoundly as if by some coincidence he had happened to touch upon the one subject which most completely absorbed her own soul. By listening to him unweariedly she had learnt the trick of his very thoughts, and now and then happened to utter the words that were on his lips. Then how exquisitely her eyelids drooped over her beautiful eyes, and how delicious was the modest hesitation with which she murmured—

"Strange that there should so often be such a coincidence of thought between us!"

The conversation had become half sentimental, half metaphysical; and Mrs. Harding was looking dreamily out across the flower-beds in the Italian garden, and the swelling greensward of the Park, when her face changed all of a sudden; and this time it was a dull deadly pallor which made itself visible under the artificial carnation. Looking listlessly at the silvan landscape, she had suddenly become aware of the figure of a man on horseback, riding at a foot-pace by the side of the iron

railings that divided the garden from the Park, and bending, as he rode, to talk to one of Sir Jasper's men who was walking by his bridle.

Mrs. Harding had recovered herself by the time the horseman drew up at the little iron gate, and dismounted from his handsome chestnut hack.

"I really think I see a friend, or at any rate an acquaintance of mine, alighting at the gate yonder," exclaimed the widow. "Yes, it is Mr. Holroyde, quite an old acquaintance. He told me he was very likely to be visiting in this neighbourhood: but I did not think he would call; and I certainly did not give him permission to do so. I trust you will not consider it an intrusion, dear Sir Jasper."

"Not at all," answered the Baronet rather stiffly. "It is only natural that Mrs. Harding's friends should be attracted to the spot where she is to be found. Is it any wonder if the foolish moths hover round so brilliant a flame?"

The widow made a coquettish little curtsey, the airiest gesture; just a graceful bend of the

swan-like throat and a fluttering of the crisp muslin draperies.

"I don't think I ought to receive that pretty speech as a compliment," she said, "it sounded so like a sneer. If the flame were ever so brilliant, there would be little danger for Mr. Holroyde's wings. He is quite an old friend of my husband's."

"Humph!" thought Sir Jasper. "Then perhaps we may hear something of the antecedents at last."

The visitor was at the foot of the terrace-steps by this time, and Mrs. Harding went forward to receive him.

"I will leave you to welcome your friend," said Sir Jasper, turning towards the house; but the widow put out her hand with the prettiest gesture of half-timid entreaty.

"Oh, please stop, and let me introduce him to you," she said. "He has heard me talk so much of you; and I am sure it is to see you that he has come here."

Sir Jasper simpered, and pressed the pretty entreating hand.

"I shall be pleased to see any friend of yours," he said, "so long as he is not too dear a friend;" and in the next moment Sir Jasper Denison and Mr. Holroyde were saluting each other courteously, while the widow introduced them.

Of course there was the usual conventional small-talk. Mr. Holroyde was delighted with Roxborough, and still more delighted with Scarsdale. He had ridden over from Marchbrooke. Of course Sir Jasper knew Marchbrooke,—Colonel Deverill Slingsby's place,—and Deverill Slingsby himself, one of the nicest fellows in the world, and an old chum of Mr. Holroyde's.

"We were at Eton together," he said; "and when I went to the University he went to Woolwich. Since then the fellow has been in every quarter of the globe, and has done some very wonderful things, I believe. I remember seeing him at a ball at the French Embassy with his breast all a-blaze with decorations. But of late years the dear old boy has retired upon his laurels, and amused himself with farming at Marchbrooke, where I need scarcely tell you that his wheat costs

him a hundred shillings a quarter, and his mutton two-and-sixpence a pound."

This mention of Colonel Slingsby placed Mr. Holroyde at once on an orthodox footing. The man who was received at Marchbrooke might be pretty safely admitted at Scarsdale. Deverill Slingsby was a bachelor, and had been something of a military mohawk in his fiery youth: but he was supposed to be tolerably steady now; and he came of one of the best old families in the county.

Sir Jasper had ample opportunity for a critical examination of Arthur Holroyde, as that gentleman stood opposite to him in the broad afternoon sunlight. Mrs. Harding's visitor was fifty years of age, and looked older than he was; but he possessed all that elegance of figure and easy grace of manner which generally belong to a man who has lived forty years in good society, and has not been overtaken by the vulgar demon called fat—the arch enemy who can blight the patrician grace of a Prince Regent, and degrade that sublime personage into an object for a spiteful Brummel's sneer.

Arthur Holroyde was tall and pale and slim. No one had ever called him a handsome man. There were many people who had called him plain; but Adonis would have envied the easy grace of his movements, Apollo might have fallen sick for very spite on beholding the airy lightness of his manner, Antinous might have committed suicide after contemplating his feet and hands.

His march through life had been one triumphal progress, so far as the fair sex had been concerned. He was not a profligate; but there are few profligates who have been so deeply steeped in baseness as Arthur Holroyde. He was a vain man; and he would have sacrificed a universe to the gratification of his vanity.

"I am not handsome," he said, "and I am no longer young. There is a bald patch on the top of my head, and the obnoxious bird has trampled out my youth by planting impressions of his hateful feet at the corners of my eyes. I am pallid and wan, and sallow and faded. Let the handsome men beware of me. Let the young men tremble before my approach. My name is Arthur

Holroyde, and I have never spared friend or enemy. *Væ victis!*"

Sir Jasper was not inclined to be altogether delighted with any friend of Mrs. Harding's; but as Mr. Holroyde might possibly throw some accidental ray of light upon the utter darkness of the lady's antecedents, the wily Baronet decided upon encouraging him. He called to the groom, and ordered the handsome chestnut to be taken to the stables.

"You will dine with us, I hope, Mr. Holroyde. We are very quiet people; but when Mrs. Harding honours us with her company we have at least one powerful attraction."

Arthur Holroyde bowed.

"I had intended returning to Marchbrooke before seven," he said; "but as my friend gives me perfect liberty, and as he never waits dinner for any one, I will yield to the temptation you kindly offer me. I have heard a great deal of Scarsdale and of its master."

"I suppose that means that you'd like to see my pictures," answered the Baronet. "We get

so many cockneys here who don't know any thing about them, and who tramp past a Guido or a Sebastian del Piombo as coolly as if it were a sign-board, that I am always very glad for them to be seen by any one who knows his Vasari.—Will you act as cicerone for your friend, Mrs. Harding? He will scarcely care to hear poor Browning's categorical descriptions, or want to be told which pictures are 'considered very fine.'—We dine at seven, Mr. Holroyde; and if you will give me half an hour before dinner, I think I shall have just light enough to show you some nice little bits of modern art in the rooms we inhabit."

This was a polite way of giving Mrs. Harding and her friend their freedom. The widow flung a pleading glance after Sir Jasper as he moved towards the window of his study; but the Baronet was disposed for a nap, and resigned himself to the idea of leaving his charmer in the society of a possible rival.

"Why should I be afraid of rivalry?" he thought, as he settled himself in his luxurious chair, and closed his eyes lazily. "Don't I know

that the widow wants to marry me, and has come here on purpose to marry me; and that it is only a question as to whether I am prepared to make the sacrifice?"

As Sir Jasper disappeared from the terrace, the expression of pleading tenderness dropped away from Mrs. Harding's face, leaving her countenance as cold and hard as if it had been cut out of stone. It is a very common simile; but the hard cold face was utterly stony in its sharply rigid outline and dull chalky pallor. The widow and her companion walked slowly away from the neighbourhood of Sir Jasper's open window in silence, until they had reached the further end of the terrace.

"Well!" said Mrs. Harding at last; "what do you want with me? and why have you followed me here, where—"

"Where you have plans with which I may possibly interfere. My sweet—Blanche, I think it is, isn't it? how very awkward these changes of name are!—my dear Mrs. Harding, if you will only be reasonable I will do all in my power to

assist your little feminine speculations instead of interfering with them. Do you value my power as a diplomatist so poorly that you will not trust me? My sweetest Blanche,—which is really a very pretty name, only a little too much *à la jeune meess* for so gorgeous a creature as yourself,—why not confide in me spontaneously, instead of placing me in the absurd attitude of a gentlemanly detective, for ever following up accidental clues in my quest of you? I found the pretty little *poulet* you left for me at your lodgings, informing me that you would be absent a month or two at the latest, and would write to me directly you returned. My dear child, if I had been an importunate bootmaker you could scarcely have treated me with less confidence. Surely, my own Blanche, you cannot be so weak as to suppose there is any possible combination of circumstances under which you could escape me. As a matter of course, I guessed where you had gone; and as an equal matter of course I divined why you had gone there. My friend Deverill Slingsby, one of the most thorough-paced scoundrels and the best of

fellows I ever had the happiness of knowing, has a place within twelve miles of this. I wrote to inform my friend that I should have the pleasure of shooting a few of his partridges, and I came down here the day before yesterday—devoted yesterday to the partridges; yesterday evening and until two o'clock this morning to my friend's society; and rode over here this afternoon. And now, dear old associate of my brighter days, let us talk seriously."

"You had better come and look at the pictures," said Mrs. Harding, in a voice that was as cold and hard as her gloomy face. She looked wonderfully like Gervoise Catheron this afternoon, and Gervoise in his worst mood. "You had better walk through the show-rooms; Sir Jasper will expect you to know something about the pictures when you dine with him."

Mr. Holroyde assented with a graceful shrug of his shoulders and an airy flutter of his hands.

"I have done all the galleries in Europe and America," he said; "why shouldn't I do Scarsdale? One infliction the more will scarcely anni-

hilate me; but oh, fairest of cicerones, let us be quick about it."

The windows of the painted drawing-room were open, and Mrs. Harding entered the state apartments of the Abbey by one of them. There was that chilly atmosphere of emptiness which always seems to pervade chambers that are kept for show and not for use, however carefully they may be aired and warmed. Mr. Holroyde skipped lightly through the apartments, glancing here and there, and shrugging his shoulders at every thing.

"Hum, hah!—man drinking, the nose seen through the glass is very fine; sold at Christie's for eleven hundred guineas as a Murillo; I believe it's a Velasquez. Greuze!—no, my dear friend; not a genuine Greuze. I don't pretend to much in that way, but I think I know Greuze. Old man—bony and black and grim; Caravaggio. Why do people paint old bony black men? and why do other people give enormous sums for them when they're painted? Perugino!—yes—'that's as may be,' as Tony Lumpkin observes. Saint tormented by Imps, by hell-fire Breughel. What

a wonderful power of detail that fellow had! Vandyck! Ah, no gentleman's gallery is complete without an example of my courtly Anthony. —And now, dearest Blanche, we'll rest ourselves on that quaint old window-seat and converse. I've taken a bird's-eye view of the collection, and I think I know how to talk to Sir Jasper. So let's be serious. A charming park, by the way. There seems to be some rustic festivity going on yonder under the trees. What is it?"

Mrs. Harding explained the nature of Miss Denison's fête.

"Miss Denison!" exclaimed Arthur Holroyde. "Oh, there is a Miss Denison, is there? Our friend the Baronet has daughters?"

"One daughter."

"Indeed! One daughter—and sons?"

"No, there is no son."

"Then the daughter is an heiress, I conclude."

"She is something more than an heiress, for she came into possession of a very handsome fortune left her by her mother when she came of age a

year or two ago. And she will have another fortune from her father."

"And this place—is it entailed? Is there any obnoxious heir-at-law who can come and turn Miss Denison out of house and home when her papa dies?"

"I believe not."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Holroyde; "Miss Denison is rather an eligible *parti*."

Mrs. Harding looked at him with a malicious smile. "I wonder whether you think yourself still invincible," she said with a sneer.

"I wonder whether I am still invincible," answered Mr. Holroyde coolly. "The man who wishes to conquer must start by thinking himself invincible. I think the first Napoleon's fortunes only turned when his remorseful fancies about poor Josephine inspired him with the idea that his star had deserted him. But let us be business-like, my dear Blanche. You want to know why I have followed you here. Unhappily the answer to that question is a very common one. Will you spare me by guessing it?"

"You want money," answered Mrs. Harding moodily.

"Don't say that *I* want money, my sweetest friend," replied Mr. Holroyde almost plaintively; "I never wanted money in my life. I look upon the vulgar coinage of the realm with utter disgust, as the source of all the unpleasantness and the larger half of the crime of the universe. Do you think that of my own accord I would come to you for so many sordid pounds and shillings, the mere weight of which would tear the linings of my pockets and destroy the set of my coats and waistcoats? But my creditors want money—the Jews want money; and finding myself pestered on every side, I came to you as the wealthiest friend to whom I can appeal; and need I say that I came to you the more especially because you owe your wealth to a happy thought of mine, and that but for that happy inspiration you might be at this moment enjoying the noble hospitality of your country in some parochial establishment?"

"I wish to heaven that you had never crossed my path!" cried the widow passionately. "I wish

to heaven I were a beggar in the streets, instead of the wretched slave I am!"

"Then go and be a beggar in the streets," replied Mr. Holroyde in his airiest manner. "That's such an absurd way of putting the thing, you know. When a man comes howling to me and says he wishes he was dead, I reply, 'Then go and *be* dead, my dear friend. Your country will hold an inquest on you, but your country will not interfere with your liberty so far as to prevent your killing yourself.' And when you, my foolish Blanche, talk absurd nonsense about being a wretched slave — a slave with fifteen hundred pounds per annum—how can I reply otherwise than I do? You wouldn't like to take off that pretty muslin—trimmed with real Valenciennes I perceive—or that sweet thing in bonnets; you wouldn't like to exchange Patterson's boots for the conventional beggar-woman's ragged sandals, or Sir Jasper Denison's hospitality for the casual ward in Roxborough Union. My Blanche, above all things let us be sensible. You owe me every thing. I claim something. You received the

half-yearly payment of your income a few weeks ago; never mind how I know it, since I do know it. I want three hundred and fifty pounds."

Mrs. Harding shook her head.

"It is quite impossible," she said. "I paid my milliner a very heavy account before I left London, and I owe a good deal to different people."

"I am sorry to hear that you have been so extravagant. But I must have the three-fifty—that is to say, the Jews must have it."

"I tell you again it is quite impossible," answered the widow in a dogged manner that was quite foreign to Sir Jasper's enchantress.

"And I deeply regret to be obliged to remark for the third time that I must have the money," returned Mr. Holroyde presently. "Your own life has been happily so remarkably exempt from trouble, that you have no idea what importunate fellows the Jews are. I can't say, by the way, that I have received any wonderful indulgence from the Christians; but when a man is down in the world, it's always a safe thing for him to fasten

his difficulties upon the Jews. I suppose it's the old business of the scapegoat over again. But to return to those unpleasant *moutons* of ours: I really must have the three-fifty."

"But if I haven't got the money—"

"Oh, I think you will find the money. If you can't manage to oblige me just now, when you are living at free quarters here with our dear Sir Jasper, when are you likely to be able to oblige me? My dearest Blanche, don't let us be nonsensical. You know you must give me the money. Wouldn't it be much wiser to give it with a good grace?"

The widow's handsome head drooped on her breast in an attitude of sullen despair. So might the Clytemnestra of Æschylus have looked when she stood beside her victim's bath, waiting till it should be time to throw the fatal net about that kingly form. But Mr. Holroyde was most serenely indifferent to dark looks. He wore a handsome cameo-ring on one of his tapering fingers, and he amused himself by taking it off that finger and trying it on the others, with the air of having

only that moment discovered what a handsome ring it was, and what charming fingers they were.

"Yes," said Mrs. Harding after a pause, "you are quite right, I must give you the money, and as much more as you choose to ask for. Of course you will take care not to make me too desperate, for then I might really throw off the mask, and tell Godfrey Pierrepoint every thing, and go out into the streets to beg, or to die. You will keep the sword dangling above my miserable head, but you will take care the hair does not break. Have you ever read any stories about those wretched galley-slaves? I have. Now and then some desperate scoundrel escapes from Toulon. To do so is, I believe, something as nearly impossible as it very well can be; but there are men who do it. And then the creature goes back to Paris, where all his crimes have been committed, and the only place in which he can be happy; and he sets up some little low wine-shop—the White Rabbit, or the Red Mill, or something in that way—and is doing well, and has saved money, when one day an old comrade drops in and calls for his *choppe*,

and recognises the landlord. You know what the comrade does, Mr. Holroyde. He talks about that 'gulf' of a place out yonder, and he is very friendly, and then on parting company he borrows a handful of francs, or a napoleon, as the case may be, and he goes away. But the White Rabbit has not seen the last of him. He comes again, and again, and again, and every time he comes he must have drink and money. He sprawls about the benches, and he spills his wine upon the floor, and he smokes in the faces of the sober customers, and sings vile songs, and he must have money before he will go away. And he comes again, and again, and again, till the wretched runaway thinks it would be better to have the old torture of the iron upon his leg and the southern sun beating down upon his head once more. I think the French call that sort of thing *chantage*, don't they, Mr. Holroyde?"

"I don't know any thing about it, my dear madam. I don't read third-rate French novels—horrible books, with smudgy engravings in the middle of the page, to say nothing of an inve-

terate limpness and a tendency to double-up suddenly, just as you are beginning to be interested. But, my dearest Blanche, the light is going; and if I am to do the civil to Sir Jasper Denison, I must go and look at his modern pictures. By the way, you will not forget that I want that three-fifty between this and nine o'clock. It happens fortunately that you have the feminine notion about bankers, and are in the habit of keeping your balance in the secret drawer of your dressing-case, or in your jewel-box, amongst those bracelets and brooches which represent the scalps of your victims. Between this and nine! Remember, I have a twelve-mile ride before I sleep to-night."

Mr. Holroyde and his companion were walking through the long gallery as he said this. The widow paused with her hand on the green-baize door that communicated with the inhabited portion of the Abbey, and looked Arthur Holroyde full in the face with angry threatening eyes.

"I wonder you are not afraid that I may murder you," she said in a low voice.

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"Do you? My dear child, you ought really to give me credit for more penetration. The last thing in the world I have to fear is any overt act of violence from you. You are too fond of yourself. The fellows who commit your revengeful murders are unhappy desperate devils whose lives are not worth a halfpenny to them. Your life is worth fifteen hundred a-year, and you are a handsome woman; and Sir Jasper Denison admires you; and there is a very pretty little game to be played yet with the cards you hold in your hand. No, dear Blanche, I am not afraid of you. If you could get any one else to murder me, it would be a different thing; but we don't live in romantic Italy in the age of the Borgias; and the hireling assassin with the infallible dagger is not available. What nice times those were, by the bye! Do you remember what the woodcutter said when he saw Cæsar Borgia throw his brother's corpse into the Tiber? 'I shan't put myself out of the way about that,' said he; 'I see that sort of thing every day in the week.'"

Mr. Holroyde found Sir Jasper basking before a cheerful fire in the yellow drawing-room, whither the visitor was conducted by Mrs. Harding, who was the Baronet's bright Circe once more, and no longer the haggard Clytemnestra of the picture-gallery. The September evening was cool; and the yellow drawing-room was rendered all the more agreeable by that cosey fire. Mr. Holroyde approached the hearth as gaily as if he had just concluded the pleasantest interview possible between devoted friends, and began to talk Allan Cunningham and Charles Blanc for the Baronet's edification; while Mrs. Harding retired to dress for dinner.

The light was not good enough for the inspection of Sir Jasper's Ettys; so the two gentlemen lounged over the fire, talking very pleasantly, until they were disturbed by the entrance of Marcia and the curate, who was to dine at the Abbey after the performance of his duty.

"The vans have just departed, papa," said Marcia; "and the children were singing the Evening Hymn as they rode away. I can't tell you

what a happy day it has been to them, or how much I owe to Mr. Silbrook's untiring exertions."

Poor Mr. Silbrook had exposed himself to a meridian sun and a September wind until his face was too red to be susceptible of becoming any redder, or he would have been covered with blushes as he acknowledged this compliment. While he was responding to Miss Denison in a husky murmur, Sir Jasper interrupted him.

"Marcia," he said, "let me introduce you to a friend of Mrs. Harding's, who is good enough to dine with us. My daughter Marcia, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Holroyde," suggested the visitor.

"My daughter, Mr. Holroyde. Mr. Silbrook, my friend and neighbour, Mr. Hol— Why, Marcia, what's the matter?"

She had turned suddenly away from the little group, and had sunk into the nearest chair. But she rose as her father spoke, and answered him quietly: "Nothing, papa. I am a little tired, and —I shall scarcely have time to dress."

She paused for a moment, looking steadily at Arthur Holroyde, as if she could not resist the

impulse that prompted her to see what this man was like; and then she left the room very quietly, but so quickly that Mr. Silbrook, eager to open the door for her, plunged forward in the dusk and ran aground against a triangular ottoman.

Five minutes before the butler announced dinner, he was intruded upon in the sanctity of his pantry by breathless little Dorothy, who entreated him to inform Sir Jasper as quietly as he could that Miss Denison was too tired to return to the drawing-room, and would take a cup of tea in her own room.

"Which I do not hold with, giving dinners to charity-children, and making the servants'-hall unbearable with the smell of roast-beef, and the housekeeper's-room as damp and sticky as a laundry with the steam of plum-puddings," remarked the stately butler to Dorothy Tursgood.

Mr. Holroyde was considerably disappointed by the absence of the heiress; and a dull despair took possession of the curate when Sir Jasper coolly announced the fact of his daughter's fatigue. He had looked forward with such thrill-

ing enjoyment to this banquet, to be shared with her. He ate his dinner without knowing what he was eating. The lights and the flowers and the glitter of silver and shimmer of fairy glass delighted him not. He dropped the ice in his soup, and spilt the salt in his wine; and the beautiful Marquise, in her wine-dark violet dress, was not there—not *his* marquise at least. Mrs. Harding occupied her old place on Sir Jasper's right hand, a little paler than usual, but with a languishing pensive air that charmed the Baronet; and she had contrived to dress herself to perfection in a *demi-toilette* of pale-gray silk relieved with delicate pink, and with one large half-shattered rose fastened amongst the luxuriance of her dark hair. It was a natural rose; and as she talked to Sir Jasper the perfumed petals were scattered by a motion of her graceful head, and fluttered upon his shoulder in a little shower of sweetness. Perhaps the half-blown rose was what Balzac would have called a *mouche*.

Once in the course of the dinner there was a little pause in the conversation, and Mr. Holroyde

rousing himself as if from a reverie, exclaimed: "Oh, by the way, I wonder what has won the Leger. I am not a 'horsy' man, and indeed don't take the faintest interest in that sort of thing; but however indifferent a man is, he is apt to find himself wondering at this time in the evening."

He said this with his most graceful carelessness of manner; and his indifference was quite genuine. He was *not* a horsy man; no man who cares to be a hero amongst women ever is; and as to the race—somebody would be ruined no doubt, and somebody else would win a heap of money, and there would be a general shuffling of the cards, but no possible gain therefrom for Mr. Arthur Holroyde. How was he to guess that on that northern race-course there had been another hazard above and beyond the ordinary prizes and the ordinary hazards of the meeting, and that a horse had run for no less a stake than the brilliant Arthur Holroyde's life—and had lost!

CHAPTER IV.

"AND I—WHAT I SEEM TO MY FRIEND, YOU SEE!"

THE telegram that reached Roxborough in the September evening brought despair to the hearts of Henry Adolphus Dobb and his most dangerous adviser. The news came almost as quickly as it could come to the tobacconist's shop, where the two men sat pale and nervous, trying to look unconcerned, trying to carry matters with a high hand, and to smoke their cigars and talk lightly of general topics, but suffering a torture only second to that of the wretch who waits in the dock while a British jury deliberates upon his doom. A breathless boy came with the telegram. The tobacconist was horsy, and went shares with a sporting neighbour in the expense of the message. There were a good many men in the shop, privileged customers, all waiting for the same in-

telligence, and all failing dismally in the attempt to assume an easy and indifferent bearing. They pressed round the tobacconist as he tore open the envelope and read the message; but Dobb pushed fiercely through the little throng, and put his hand upon the man's shoulder, craning over him to look at the paper in his hand.

"Fly-by-night first, Heliogabalus second, Two-penny-Postman a bad third."

And neither the lieutenant nor the clerk had backed the horse for a place: they had backed him to win! They had set their lives upon "this little chance," like Dr. Mackay's Salamandrine, and had lost.

Mr. Dobb's face was of a dull livid complexion as he rejoined his companion, a little way outside the eager circle round the tobacconist. Gervoise Catheron had no need to ask any questions about the message; he could read the result of the race in the face of his friend. They went out into the street silently, and they had walked several yards before either spoke. They turned as if instinctively out of the bustling crowded High Street into

that dismal little lane leading to the river, the dreary little lane in which Gervoise had walked with the brilliant widow some nine months before. Men in difficulty or despair seem to take to these dirty lanes and dark obscure alleys as naturally as a wild animal takes to his covert.

"This is a nice fix you've got me into!" the clerk said at last in a hoarse breathless manner.

"Don't say *I've* got you into it, Dobb, old fellow. Lord knows *I* didn't make the horse lose," pleaded the lieutenant, in whose tones there was some touch of fear. It is not pleasant for the tempter to encounter the reproaches of his victim. Surely once or so in the course of that dark life-drama Mephistopheles must have been ever so little afraid of Faust.

"No, but you told me he was safe to win," answered the clerk with a bitterness that was almost hysterical. "You talked and talked until you talked me into being a worse fool than yourself. Yes, and fifty times a worse fool, for what risk have you run in backing the horse? *I've* staked my name and character, and my house and home,

and the bread I eat, upon him; and what did *you* stand to lose? What does a beggar lose when he gets his friend into a hole?"

"Come now, Dobb, I say, old fellow—"

"Gervoise Catheron," cried Henry Adolphus, turning upon his companion savagely, "how are you going to get me the money that I took out of the safe in our office? It must be put back there, every sixpence of it, before Saturday night. How are you going to get it?"

"Don't be violent, Dobb. I—I—*can't* talk about how I shall get it while you go on like that; but—I—*will* get it."

"You *shall* get it!" cried the clerk. "Yes, as sure as there's a heaven above us, you shall! I know your little game. You'll try to fool me in this matter as you've done in others. It will be 'to-morrow, Dobb;' and 'next week, Dobb;' and 'the week after next, Dobb.' That won't do this time. I'm telling you no lies; though, you're so accustomed to telling them yourself, I daresay you can't believe another man can tell the truth. I tell you that if I don't get that money between

this and Saturday night, I shall be a disgraced man before Monday morning. You found out that old Sloper had gone to Rotterdam, did you? that was very clever of you; but you didn't take the trouble to find out when he was coming back. What does that matter to you? *You're* not his clerk. *You're* not responsible for the money that's been taken out of the safe. *You* won't be a beggar and a thief if the money isn't put back there. Old Sloper will be home on Saturday; and before he goes to bed on Saturday night, he'll have me in his private office and have the account of the cash collections out of me, down to the last halfpenny, and he'll bully if there's a halfpenny short. That's what I've got to look to, Mr. Catheron; and you must get me that money."

The brewer's-clerk trembled with excitement and passion. If he had been a prime-minister and his honour and position at stake, he could not have been more deeply moved. A hundred and twenty pounds a-year is not much in the abstract; but it is a great deal when it represents

the income which seven years or so of patient labour and very tolerable conduct have enabled a man to achieve. And though a brewer's-clerk's honour and good name may not be much in the history of the world, they are supremely important to the brewer's-clerk himself. Moreover, Henry Adolphus Dobb was a pompous little man, and had been wont to lord it over his circle. Disgrace to him would have been infinitely more bitter than to a humbler spirit.

"Don't I tell you that I'll get you the money?" said the lieutenant. "It's no good glaring at me like that, as if you were going to have a pound of my flesh and were eyeing me over to see where you'd take it. I can't coin the money, or pick it up out of the mud in this lane. You must give me time—reasonable time," added Mr. Catheron hastily: for the clerk made a kind of spring at him—he had heard that miserable phrase about the giving of time so often before. "I tell you I'm not going to drop you into any hole. Between this and Saturday you shall have the money, come what may. I—I think I know

a quarter where I can get it: and it shall be got."

"You think you know a quarter!—what quarter? Why didn't you get money from that quarter before, when you told me you could not beg, borrow, or steal a five-pound note to bet upon that confounded horse."

"Never mind about that, Dobb. Perhaps I have had money from the quarter I speak of, and have been obliged to dispose of it to more pressing creditors than you, and haven't liked to tell you about it for fear you should turn disagreeable. Never mind where or how I get the money; I tell you it shall be got."

"Yes," answered the clerk, "I know your sneaking tricks. You'll be getting leave of absence, and you'll run up to London on pretence of looking for the money, and you'll stay away till after Saturday; and when you come back, your friend Dobb—your tool and your catspaw—will be in Roxborough Gaol on a charge of embezzlement, and you'll snap your fingers at him outside his bars. And who'll believe him if he

says that the fine gentleman tempted him to take the money? Not a living soul. I'll tell you what it is, Gervoise Catheron," cried Mr. Dobb, stopping suddenly and seizing his companion's coat-collar with no very gentle grasp, "I'm not going to leave you till you get me that money. If there's any quarter you can get it from, go there at once and I'll go with you; but I've been fooled once too often, and know what you are; and, so help me Heaven, I won't part company from you till I've got that money!"

"Dobb, for mercy's sake be reasonable!"

"Yes, you'd be very reasonable if you stood in my shoes. Do you know what it is to have lived in a place, man and boy, for seven-and-twenty years? No, you don't. Do you know what it is to have worked hard for every bit you've eaten and every drop you've drunk, and to be able to lay your hand upon your heart and say you don't owe any man a sixpence, and never wronged any man out of a farthing? Not you. Do you know what it is to live in a place where every one has known you and been friendly

to you ever since you were a child, and knew your father before you and your grandfather before him, and knew 'em both for honest men? Not you, not a bit of it. It's natural to *you* to cheat. It's natural to *you* to have men pointing at you as the fellow that owes them money and will never pay it. It isn't in *you* to understand what disgrace is to such as me."

"Dobb," said Mr. Catheron, "if—if—I was circumstanced in any way but what I am, I should knock you down. I'm in your power, and you're free to insult me. I've got you into a hobble, I know; but if you'll have a little patience with me, I'll get you out of it."

"Between this and Saturday night, remember. The money won't be worth sixpence to me after Saturday night. I know what old Sloper is: there'll be no mercy there. Not an hour's grace, if I went down upon my knees for it."

"You shall have the money," answered the lieutenant with an air of conviction. But Mr. Dobb was not to be satisfied by any vague assurances of this kind. He had been too often be-

guiled by his friend's delusive promises. He insisted upon knowing what mysterious source the lieutenant relied upon, and little by little Mr. Catheron was induced to reveal the fact of his connection with Sir Jasper's fascinating visitor.

"She's a kind of relation," he admitted, as the clerk pressed him closer and closer. "And she has more money than she can know what to do with; but she's as mean as she can well be. However, when she knows my position is desperate, she'll shell out handsomely, I daresay."

"Oh, you daresay, do you?" cried the clerk ironically. "A deal of good your daresaying will do me on Saturday, when old Sloper hauls me over the coals in his private office, where the very chair he sits upon is made to turn on a pivot, in order that he may spin round suddenly at any moment and stare a fellow out of countenance with those old ferret's-eyes of his. I tell you what it is, Mr. Catheron, I've a strong suspicion that the name of the lady you've been talking about is Mrs. Cock-and-a-bull, or Mrs. Harris, or Mrs. anybody that never had any existence; and

that the whole story is an out-and-out crammer. But if you think I'm going to be made a fool of this time, my friend, you're very much mistaken. They may lock me up in Roxborough Gaol after Saturday night; but between this and then I'll stick to you like old boots."

Hereupon, of course, the lieutenant again protested. And after a great deal of protestation and argumentation, it was finally agreed that Mr. Catheron should write a letter demanding an immediate interview with the lady at the Abbey, and that the clerk should not only read this letter, but should with his own hands deliver it to Mrs. Harding. Not less than this would satisfy Mr. Dobb, and the lieutenant found that it was necessary to satisfy Mr. Dobb at any cost. The two young men went straight to Amanda Villas, where the face of Selina Dobb greeted them very wan and fretful of aspect. Henry Adolphus had been erratic in his habits lately, and Twopenny-Postman had made a considerable breach between the husband and wife.

"The teapot's as cold as a stone, and the kettle

has been off the boil for the last hour," said Selina plaintively, as she followed her husband and his friend into the little parlour, where a sloppy teatray, a brown earthenware teapot, a jagged-looking quartern loaf in the last stage of staleness, and all those ragged cuttings of slate-coloured glazed lining, and balls of cotton and strips of whalebone and open papers of pins which belong to the process of dressmaking adorned the table. But the clerk only muttered, "Oh, d—n! nobody wants your cat-lap!" as he pushed away the pins and glazed lining with a ruthless hand, and cleared a little space upon the oil-cloth table-cover.

"Catheron wants to write a letter," he said, "so look sharp with the pen and ink, 'Lina."

"I think Mr. Catheron might find it convenient to write his letters elsewhere, instead of making a rag of Miss Pennekit's new silk-dress," replied Mrs. Dobb stiffly.

She had just picked up a rustling silken garment which the two men had walked over. Her pale eyes had an angry look in them as she turned them upon the lieutenant. She had begun to

understand that he was a dangerous friend for her husband, though she had no idea of the extent of the danger.

"Miss Pennekit and her dress may go to Bath!" exclaimed the clerk, with defiance in his tone. "Give us over the pen and ink, will you?"

Spoken to thus contumaciously, Mrs. Dobb performed her husband's behest with a dignified sulkiness, which is a wife's best armour. Of course she would have something to say to Mr. Dobb about this evening's behaviour; but what she had to say would keep, and would be all the better for keeping. Sir Emerson Tennent tells us that the crocodile is troubled with so weak a digestion that he will not eat his prey while it is fresh, but will hide it for some days, and devour it by and by in a state of decomposition; and in the same manner do some wives hide away their grievances, until the wrong grows rank with long keeping. Mrs. Dobb handed her lord and master a very smart china inkstand, with very little ink and a very execrable pen in it; and then she

gathered up Miss Pennekit's dress and its belongings, and withdrew. She thus asserted her position as an outraged matron, and had the best of Henry Adolphus. He had asked for pen and ink, and she had given him pen and ink; but he had not asked her for paper, and she had not given him paper; though she was perfectly aware that such a commodity was necessary to the production of a letter. It was rather a satisfaction to her to hear him opening little drawers and cupboards and using bad language in his search for what he wanted, as she settled herself to her work in the adjoining chamber.

Mr. Dobb found a few sheets of note-paper at last; and Gervoise Catheron scrawled his brief epistle, with the clerk looking over his shoulder.

"My dear Blanche,—I want to see you on particular business, and the first thing to-morrow morning, if possible. I don't want to come to the Abbey, as I daresay you wouldn't care to see me there. But I'll meet you in the wood; say somewhere between the west gate and the Hermitage,

and say eleven to-morrow morning, which will give you time to slip out after breakfast. Send me a line to say 'Yes' to this, or appoint your own time; but let it be early to-morrow. I am in a desperate fix this time, and must have help somehow or other.—Yours always, G. C.

"P.S. The bearer may be trusted."

The letter was folded and sealed under Mr. Dobb's eye. Indeed that gentleman watched the document with an air that implied his apprehension of possible legerdemain on the part of Gervoise with regard to this mysterious epistle. When he had put it in his own waistcoat-pocket, the clerk seemed a little more comfortable than he had been since the news of the Postman's defeat. But even then he was by no means quite easy in his mind. He put on his overcoat and hat, and bawled to his wife to the effect that he was going out again, and wouldn't be back for an hour or so; and then looking very suspiciously at Mr. Catheron, he said:

"Come, you may as well go with me. It's a

walk; and you can walk that way as well as any other."

But the lieutenant pleaded some duty which would oblige his return to quarters; and the clerk was fain to part company with him at the gates of Castleford Barracks, very much against his will.

"He may get leave and be off to London, and sell me, for all I know," thought Mr. Dobb, as he made his way by back-slums and bye-roads to Roxborough Bridge.

He walked so fast—in an involuntary hurry, which arose from hurry and tumult of his mind rather than any necessity for haste—that he was hot and breathless by the time he came to the bridge. He leaned against the stone balustrade to recover himself, and mopped his damp forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. As he stood bare-headed doing this, he looked down at the water flowing so quietly under the ponderous arch.

"If the worst came to the worst, *you're* pleasant and cool," muttered Mr. Dobb; "and I'd rather face you than the people who've known me ever since I was a child, and the fellows I've been

cheeky to. They'd have it out of me with interest if I was in Roxborough Gaol for embezzlement; and there's not one of 'em would pity me or believe I'd been made a fool of. 'Downy Dobb' they've called me, and I've been proud of it; but I should find my downiness go against me if I was in trouble."

The chimes of Roxborough Cathedral pealed the first quarter after eight as the clerk mused upon the bridge, and a little drizzling rain began to fall from a black starless sky. Through this rain, which got heavier every minute, Mr. Dobb walked to Scarsdale, and presented himself, a miserable object, at the servants' entrance. It was after nine o'clock by this time, and a hopelessly wet night.

"A case of cats and dogs," Mr. Dobb remarked, as he spun his hat upon his hand, making a kind of ornamental water-work for the edification of the man who admitted him. He was on familiar terms with all the Scarsdale servants; for the ale consumed at the Abbey was Sloper and Halliday's manufacture. There were malthouses

and brewhouses that might have served for Sloper and Halliday themselves at the back of the Abbey, but Sir Jasper objected to the smell of brewing; and there had been no such thing as home-brewed October since the time of the last baronet.

Mr. Catheron had enjoined his friend to convey his letter as quietly as possible to the lady for whom it was intended; so the clerk pretended that he had come to Scarsdale with a message from his wife to Dorothy. Little Dorothy was sent for, while Mr. Dobb dried his wet garments before a blazing fire in the chief butler's own room, and sipped some steaming brandy-and-water prepared for him by the chief butler's own hands. She came, flushed and breathless; for as there was only one person worth speaking of in her world, she had taken it for granted that the clerk had brought her tidings of her lover.

The chief butler laid down his newspaper and withdrew as Miss Tursgood entered the room. He was a most gentlemanly creature in a pompous way, and did the right thing upon all occasions.

"You'll find me in Mrs. Browning's room, if you'll step that way before you go, Dobb," he said politely. "In the mean time I beg you to consider this apartment at your own disposal."

"Is—is any thing the matter with Gervoise?" cried Dorothy beseechingly, as the door closed upon the butler. She saw that Mr. Dobb's countenance was disturbed, and she looked at him with terrified appealing eyes, as if he held her fate in his hands. It does seem like this sometimes with regard to the messenger of trouble. It seems as if his voice were the voice of Fate, and as if it lay in his power to make our sorrow more or less.

"Oh, Lord, no! there's nothing the matter with *him*, Doll!" answered Mr. Dobb contemptuously, as if it were not in the nature of the lieutenant to have any thing the matter with him; "but there's a precious deal the matter with me. However, that's neither here nor there; or, at any rate, it isn't here. You've got a lovely female residing under this roof by the name of Harding."

Even with the prospect of Roxborough Gaol looming darkly upon him in the dim future of

Saturday night, Mr. Dobb's music-hall experiences compelled him to say "lovely female," where another man would have said "a lady."

"Yes, Henry Adolphus."

"Then what you've got to do is to give her this letter, on the quiet; and to bring me an answer, likewise on the quiet; and to be uncommon lively about it; for I have been cooking myself long enough before this fire; and sha'n't I get black looks from that precious cousin of yours when I get home?"

"But Mrs. Harding is sure to be in the drawing-room, and I don't know how I shall get to speak to her without every body knowing," answered Dorothy, taking the letter. "Why, it's from Gervoise!" she cried, as she recognised the weak illegible hand.

"Well, who said it wasn't?"

"But what does *he* want with Mrs. Harding?"

"Never you mind that. There's no occasion for the green-eyed monster to exhibit his obnoxious claws. It isn't a *love*-letter—I can tell you that, Miss Tursgood; and that's about all I can

tell you. So the sooner you make yourself scarce, and bring me back the answer, the better."

Dorothy was fain to accept her cousin's assurance. She was not so much jealous as mystified by the errand intrusted to her. Of course, if it had been a love-letter, it would not have been given her to deliver. And then Mrs. Harding was ever so much older than the lieutenant. Gervoise had dropped hints about his acquaintance with the brilliant widow; and that acquaintance had been put forward as the reason why Dorothy's engagement must be kept a secret from her kind mistress.

She made her way to the corridor, out of which the family apartments opened, and waited for the chance of communicating with Mrs. Harding. She had not to wait very long. A man came carrying coffee-cups on an antique salver. Dorothy asked him to tell Mrs. Harding that a person wished to speak to her; and five minutes afterwards the lady came out into the corridor.

"Well," she said, rather sharply; "what is it?"

"A letter, please, ma'am; and I am to wait for an answer."

The widow took the missive, and tore open the envelope. Her face clouded as she looked at the address, and it grew darker as she read the letter. After reading it, she stood for a minute or so thinking; and there was such an absent look upon her face, that Dorothy fancied she had forgotten all about the answer.

"Will you please to let me have the answer presently, ma'am?" the little maid asked meekly.

"The answer is 'Yes'—nothing else. Who brought the letter, and how did it come into your hands?" asked the widow, looking at Dorothy with searching eyes.

"It was brought by my cousin, ma'am; at least by my cousin's husband, who is a friend of Mr. Catheron's."

"A friend of Mr. Catheron's! You have got the name very pat, upon my word, Miss Tursgood; and pray do *you* know Mr. Catheron?"

The girl's face grew crimson as she answered, "I have met him at my cousin's, ma'am."

It seemed such a hard thing not to be able to look straight into those scornful eyes, and say, "And I am to be his wife." But the dark shadow of secrecy already overhung Dorothy's life, and she endured this penalty as patiently as she would have endured heavier penalties for his sake.

She dropped a little curtsey, and tripped away. The widow looked after her with a malicious smile. But perhaps there was a little touch of envy underlying her scorn. Not to win half-a-million of money could Mrs. Harding's world-worn face have glowed with those ingenuous blushes; not for the prize of an empire could her feet have tripped along the corridor with that elastic girlish step.

"I wonder whether it is nice to be young and fresh and silly, like that," she thought. "I can't remember the time in which I did not know the world almost as well as I know it now. I have to thank my father for that—and for very little else."

She went back to the drawing-room, where Arthur Holroyde was making himself very agreeable to his host. The rain had begun a little before the time at which the visitor had asked for

his horse; and as the night grew blacker and the weather more hopelessly bad, the hospitable Baronet had insisted on Mr. Holroyde remaining.

"Your friend will understand that a twelve-mile ride on such a night as this is an impossibility. I suppose you told him where you were coming?"

"Oh, yes; Deverill knew I was coming to Scarsdale."

"Then he will naturally conclude you are stopping at Scarsdale. But if you think there is any likelihood of Colonel Slingsby's household being inconvenienced by your non-return, we can send a boy with a message. I don't suppose stable-boys have any objection to this kind of weather."

Mr. Holroyde protested that there was no occasion for the sending of any messenger.

"Dare-devil Deverill's servants—they used to give him that *sobriquet* in his mess—are too well accustomed to the erratic habits of their master. There will be no sitting up for me. There will be a door left unbarred somewhere in the back premises, and a candle on the hall-table, I dare-

say; but no further preparation for my coming. I don't think they ever do lock the doors at Marchbrooke, by the bye; but as Slingsby is a collector of bull-terriers, the burglars allow him to enjoy his old silver. He has been giving five-and-twenty shillings an ounce for candlesticks lately."

"A more civilised taste than I should have given him credit for," murmured Sir Jasper, toying complacently with a bonbon-box, which had, or had not, been given by Louis XIII. to Madame de Chevreuse.

So Mr. Holroyde stayed at the Abbey, and gratified Sir Jasper amazingly with his conversation; or perhaps still more so by the graceful manner in which he listened to Sir Jasper's discourse. He slept in the blue bedroom, in the bed by which Godfrey Pierrepoint had lifted his soul to heaven in the passionate prayer of his blighted manhood. And yet no uncomfortable dreams haunted the placid slumbers of the elegant and easy-going Arthur Holroyde. It had been his habit to take life lightly, and not to think too much of unpleasant things. He brushed the re-

cord of his sins and follies off his memory almost as easily as he brushed the dust from his coat in these latter days when he had no valet to do it for him.

CHAPTER V.

DIABOLICAL SUGGESTION.

MRS. HARDING entered the cosey little paneled chamber, which was used as a breakfast-room, very early on the morning after Mr. Holroyde's visit. But although the Abbey-clock had not yet struck eight, she found Arthur Holroyde standing in the bay-window, contemplating the woody landscape, beautiful in the sunlight of a delicious September morning. Men who lead actively wicked lives are generally early risers. It is only your passive, negatively bad man—your Charles Stuart, or your Rochester—who lie late o' mornings. Nero must be waking early when he has the burning of Rome to arrange for his evening festival; and Marie Marguerite d'Aubray, Marchioness of Brinvilliers, can have little leisure in which to oversleep herself. Arthur Holroyde's life had been a very

active one, and the earliest glories of the eastern sunlight generally shone upon his waking eyes and found him busy planning the campaign of the day. He was the younger son of a younger son, and had never had any money of his own worth speaking of; yet he had lived, and had lived the sort of life which, in his estimation, was a very pleasant one. He had patronised the best tradesmen, and had been hunted by the best sheriff's-officers, and had taken flight to the pleasantest Continental cities, when the dark hour of insolvency came upon him. He had been outlawed, and had spent many years of his wicked existence in those foreign resting-places where Vice assumes her most graceful shape, and flaunts her brilliant image in the very face of poor humdrum Virtue. And he had contrived to enjoy himself very tolerably, living from hand to mouth, and picking up his money in all manner of crooked ways, but preserving the whiteness of his hands, the perfect symmetry of his slender feet, and the gracious sweetness of that smile which had been irresistible to weak womankind ever since the penniless under-

graduate had left the University with an ineffable belief in his own powers, and a profound contempt for his fellow-men—a contempt which he was wise enough to hide under the mask of good-nature. There is nothing more easy to acquire than a reputation for good-nature; and, in running for the prize of popularity, the man who says agreeable things will always win the race against the man who only performs benevolent actions. The fortune of a millionaire will not allow the benevolent man to give every body as much as he asks for; but the pleasant-spoken man will make himself agreeable to the universe, and be none the poorer for the transaction, but in all probability very much the richer. All the substantial goodness of a Douglas Jerrold will not counterbalance one stinging witticism in the mind of the victim who has been stung. Mr. Holroyde had chosen his path in life at the outset, and had never swerved from it. For him Rochester's epitaph on his gracious sovereign might have been paraphrased. He was a man who never did a civil thing, and never said a rude one. He turned as the widow

entered the room, and greeted her with his delightful smile.

"How nice this is!" he exclaimed; "I quite relied upon your being early this morning, and you have not disappointed me. I have been admiring the landscape. Upon my word, Burke's landed gentry have a great deal to be thankful for; and if it were not for the penalty they endure in having to pay their debts, would be fitting objects for a poor man's envy. How delicious nature is after rain—so fresh, so smiling, so elastic! I always fancy the effect of rain upon nature is rather like the influence of ready-money upon mankind—such a balmy, revivifying process, you know. And, by the bye, that brings me to what I don't care to talk about—that three hundred and fifty for the Jews."

Mrs. Harding took an envelope from her pocket and handed it to Arthur Holroyde. He crumpled the paper between his fingers, and listened smilingly to the little crackling noise produced by the operation.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "ready-money is unques-

tionably the dew which revives the parched and faded spirit. The grass is dry and withered, but the genial moisture descends, and the herb is green again. My sweetest Blanche, this is more than kind of you," murmured Mr. Holroyde, as he tore open the envelope; and so perfect was his expression of gratitude, that it seemed as if the money extorted from the moody-looking widow had been the free tribute of generous friendship. "I will not insult you by counting the notes," he said, as he transferred them to a dainty little pocket-book, fragrant with the odour peculiar to russia leather. "How much?"

"All I have in the world, except a few pounds to get me away from this place," answered Mrs. Harding with a gloom of manner which would have very much amazed Sir Jasper if he could have beheld it; "three hundred pounds. I cannot give you a sixpence more. I couldn't if Godfrey Pierrepoint were in the next room and you threatened to go straight to him and betray me."

"But I don't threaten any thing," replied Mr. Holroyde. "I never have threatened, and I

cannot imagine any position arising in which I should find myself compelled to threaten. Why, even in that little parable of yours about the galley-slave, the runaway's old acquaintance does not threaten. The runaway is a good deal too wise to allow any thing of that kind to become necessary. He helps his old chum from time to time without grumbling, and his old chum is grateful. I am sorry you couldn't manage three-fifty; but the Jews must be satisfied with the three hundred—on account."

"Are you never afraid," asked Mrs. Harding, looking up at her companion with dark threatening eyes,—"are you never afraid that something may happen to you—on account of your wickedness?"

"No," answered Mr. Holroyde lightly; "all sorts of unpleasant things happen to me, but not on account of my wickedness; for I find still more unpleasant things happening to the most praiseworthy individuals. If there had been any adequate system of rewards and punishments in this life, and if a man could have insured himself

a handsome income for his middle age by behaving decently in his youth, there should have been no better-conducted young man than myself. But I perceived at a very early age that the people who make the great fortunes are not the good people. As for myself, I have never gone out of my way to be wicked. A man must live, you know,—in his own opinion at least that is a primary necessity; and I have done the best I could for myself with regard to existence. As for punishment, I have begun to feel disagreeable twinges under my right shoulder, which one doctor attributes to cold, another to liver, and a third to debility; but I daresay Wilberforce had just the same sort of twinges after his fiftieth birthday, in spite of all those emancipated Negroes. And now, my dear Blanche, let us talk of more agreeable subjects. How long do you remain here?"

"I don't know."

"Blanche, of all qualities, there is none so charming as candour. Why do you refuse to be candid? Do you suppose that I am blind to your

views, or that I disapprove your aspirations? Could not Lady Denison be as good a friend to me in the future as Blanche Harding has been in the past?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't mean any thing just at present. It is you who mean to become Lady Denison; and upon my word I fancy you have a very fair chance of succeeding if you play your cards with discretion."

"What would you say to my chances if Godfrey Pierrepoint had returned to England?"

"Humph! I should say that he could not have chosen a more awkward time for his return. But has he returned?"

"He has, and is liable at any moment to come to this house. He is the Mr. Pauncefort whose name you heard Sir Jasper mention more than once last night."

"What! the eccentric individual who lived at the Hermitage? I ought to have recognised the Baronet's description of our Camberwell Don Quixote. There scarcely can be another man in

the world who would make such a fool of himself. But where is my friend Pierrepoint now?"

"They say he has gone abroad again, that he has gone back to his old African haunts; but he still retains the cottage he lived in, and I think it is doubtful whether he has really left England. Perhaps Miss Denison could tell us something about his movements."

"Miss Denison! My dear Blanche, you become more inscrutable every moment. Why Miss Denison?"

"Because he and she were very intimate—over head and ears in love with each other, as I believe."

"Incorrigible! Our Don Quixote in love again! I thought he had done enough of that sort of thing—"

He stopped suddenly, and his expression grew a little graver than usual.

"Yes, you are right," he said; "the mind has its twinges now and then, as well as the shoulder. The liver of a hard drinker will shrivel to the size of a walnut; but he still has a liver. I suppose

the conscience of a man of the world is something like that. It gets very small, but there is a little bit of it left even at the last. If I were not too old and battered to be sorry for any thing, I should be sorry that I ever found my way to that cottage in the Camberwell lane."

He stood for some moments leaning against the mantelpiece, with his face shaded by his hand; but he was very quickly aroused from his reverie by the opening of the door and the entrance of Sir Jasper Denison, and in the next minute he was making himself delightful to the Baronet.

Miss Denison did not appear at the breakfast-table, and Mrs. Harding left the room immediately upon the conclusion of the meal to pay a little dutiful visit to Marcia's apartments; while Sir Jasper exhibited his modern pictures to his appreciative visitor.

The widow found Marcia very pale of aspect and very icy of manner, and left her, after making a few little conventional speeches, completely mystified and by no means comfortable.

"Does she know any thing about Arthur

Holroyde?" she wondered; "and is she purposely avoiding him?"

It was half-past ten when Mrs. Harding left Marcia. She went straight to her dressing-room and put on her hat and cloak. At eleven she was pacing the pathway between the west gate and the Hermitage, a path cut through the very heart of Scarsdale Wood, darkened on one side by a steeply-sloping bank overgrown with brushwood, and bordered on the other by a wilderness of fern. The place was dark and gloomy even in the day, and as black as Erebus after nightfall. But the inhabitants of Scarsdale thought no more of plunging into it at ten o'clock on a moonless night than a Cockney would think of walking down Cheapside.

Mrs. Harding paced the woodland pathway for about a quarter of an hour before the lieutenant made his appearance. He had never been in time for an appointment in his life, and he came to this flushed with running.

"I had the deuce of a bother to get here in any thing like time," he said. "It's very good

of you to meet me, Beau—Blanche. I—I thought you'd turn up trumps if you knew a fellow's affairs were desperate."

"If you mean yourself when you say a 'fellow,' I never knew your affairs to be otherwise than desperate," said Mrs. Harding in her harshest voice—and her voice could be very harsh sometimes. "I'm afraid you won't be quite so enthusiastic about my coming when you hear that I have only come to say I can't afford you any assistance; and that it is utterly useless for you to pester me with letters, or attack me through the agency of your vulgar friends."

"I tell you what it is, Blanche," said the lieutenant, with an air of resolution that was not at all usual to him, "it is a very serious matter with me this time, and I *must* have some money."

"Then you must get it elsewhere. You will get none from me, for I have none to give you."

"I don't believe you."

"You may believe me or not, as you please. You so rarely tell the truth yourself, that it is only natural you should suspect me of a falsehood.

All the money I possess amounts to exactly nine pounds sixteen shillings, and I shall want quite as much as that to get me creditably away from this place to my old lodgings, where I can live upon credit for a month or two."

"I don't believe you, Blanche," answered Gervoise Catheron. "I know you women can spend a heap of money upon your flounces and furbelows; but I can't believe you spend fifteen hundred a-year."

"I do not spend fifteen hundred a-year," replied Mrs. Harding moodily.

"What the deuce becomes of your money, then?"

"Suppose I have another pensioner more extortionate than you are!"

"What other pensioner?"

"Arthur Holroyde."

"Arthur Holroyde!" cried the lieutenant, growing very pale. "You don't mean that *he* takes your money from you—Godfrey Pierrepoint's money?"

"I can mean it, and I do mean it."

"Good God!" exclaimed the lieutenant; "I did not think there was such meanness in the world. I don't set up for being a particularly honourable fellow; but I did not believe that any creature calling himself a man could be mean enough for that."

"Creatures calling themselves men can be mean enough for any thing, if it is to their own advantage to be so," answered Mrs. Harding coldly. She was in no humour to draw any nice distinctions between the conduct of the two men who wanted her money. They both tormented her, and between them they contrived to make her life very wretched. She was scarcely capable of considering any thing beyond that just now.

"Arthur Holroyde took three hundred pounds from me this morning," she said, after a pause, during which the lieutenant seemed to be so much absorbed by the consideration of Mr. Holroyde's meanness as to be for the moment forgetful of his own necessities; "and he left me with less than ten pounds."

"Caroline," said Gervoise Catheron presently,

"or Blanche, if you like it better, I did not know that Arthur Holroyde was in England—I did not even know that he was alive; but I certainly thought that you and he had never met since you left Buenos Ayres, and that a meeting between him and you would be about the last thing likely to happen. That you should hold any communication with him now—that so much as one sixpence of Pierrepoint's money should pass into his hands, shocks me more deeply than I can express."

"You talk like a fool!" exclaimed Mrs. Harding impatiently. "Do you suppose *I* sought out Mr. Holroyde, or that I ever wished to see his false face again? I met him accidentally at Baden when I was there with—my sister, and I met him again at Naples, just before my sister died; since then I have done my utmost to avoid him, and have descended even to stratagem in my desire to escape from him; but he has hunted me from place to place, and now he has hunted me out here."

"But why do you give him your money?"

"Why do *you* torment me with senseless

questions?" 'cried Blanche Harding, passionately. "Can't you guess why I accede time after time to his extortionate demands? Do you suppose I want the history of my life blazoned wherever I go? and do you suppose he would refrain from the telling of it, if I did not pay him to hold his tongue? I am here under a feigned name—respected, caressed, almost the mistress of this place. He knows that here, above all places, there would be ruin for me in a few words from him. That is why he asks me for money, and that is why I give it to him."

"He ought to be shot like a dog!" gasped the lieutenant. "I should think the man committed no sin who shot that scoundrel as he would shoot a mad dog."

"If I had a brother who cared for me, Arthur Holroyde might be in some danger," answered Mrs. Harding; "but as it is—"

"If you had a brother who cared for you!" repeated Gervoise, with some touch of feeling in his tone. "As if you didn't know that I care for you—as much as an unfortunate devil like me can

care for any thing or any body. Good God!" exclaimed the lieutenant, carried away by a sudden passion of remorse that was very foreign to the listless indifference of his ordinary manner, "what a miserable set of wretches we Catherons have been from first to last, and what a despicable life we have all led! Why, the very first person I remember in the way of a stranger was a sheriff's-officer, and I think he gave me sixpence, and that I liked him, and wondered why my father swore at him and abused him. What a childhood we had! What a youth! hustled out of one lodging and hurried into another; leaving every place in debt, and living under feigned names in obscure neighbourhoods, where people believed in us and trusted us, until we went away, stealing our own luggage, bit by bit, under cover of dark nights. Why, Fra Diavolo and Dick Turpin were splendid fellows compared to us. Cartouche and Jack Sheppard were not so base as we were, for they risked their lives. Do you remember the King's Bench, and the Lord Chasingsteeple who was such a great man there in our

time? Upon my word, I thought that he was a great creature, and the only nobleman in the world. Do you remember the snug little dinners my father used to give in his rooms in the state-house, while his creditors were cursing him outside? Do you remember that man who used to come round at eight o'clock with a basket and a bell, and some cry about the corned beef and legs of mutton? That was the only curfew I ever heard when I was a child. Is it any wonder I grew up a scamp? Is it any wonder that nothing but shame and misery has ever come out of the lives of any of us? The first lesson we ever learnt was to tell lies to tradespeople, and to look as if we were telling the truth; and is it any wonder that we grew up vile and false? Do you remember that story about papa expecting remittances from the North? I suppose it had a meaning once, and that my father really had property in the North; but I know we repeated it to people long after it had ceased to be any thing but a shameless lie. And all our meannesses and lies and petty miseries arose from the want of a little

money. Good heavens! when I remember all this, I am inclined to believe that the most wretched creature upon earth is the man who has been brought up as a gentleman, and has no money to keep his useless empty life honestly in his body. If I ever marry and have sons—and Heaven knows the poor devils would be very much to be pitied for having such a father—I would apprentice them to blacksmiths or carpenters; they should sit cross-legged upon boards and stitch other people's garments; or burrow in preposterous boxes at the corners of streets and cobble other people's boots; they should climb up ladders and light lamps; they should walk twenty miles a-day and deliver letters; they should do the vilest, dirtiest, commonest work that has to be done in the world, rather than they should call themselves gentlemen, and live upon other people's money, and talk about Edward the Confessor."

The lieutenant's passionate tirade might as well have been a soliloquy for any effect which it produced upon his companion. That lady had a great deal to think of just now, and could not

afford to give her attention to the feelings or opinions of an importunate brother, who only wrote to her or came to her when he wanted money. She was thinking of what he had said about Arthur Holroyde: "Such a man ought to be shot like a dog!"

"I wish some one would shoot him. I wish some poacher could know of the money he carries about him, and would lie in wait for him and murder him as he rides through the wood. He was right when he said that there are no assassins to be hired in these days; if there were, his life would not be very safe."

This was what Mrs. Harding was thinking as she walked by her brother's side. A prowling man in corduroy went by her presently; a man with a swarthy visage and a bull-neck, encircled by a bird's-eye handkerchief which in itself would have been evidence against him, so murderous was the noose-like knot that fastened it.

"You are very ugly and very dirty," thought Mrs. Harding, as she looked at the prowling man; "but ugly and dirty as you are, I would kiss you

if I thought you would stop Arthur Holroyde on his way home to-night."

"Come, Blanche," said Gervoise presently, "for mercy's sake, have a little compassion upon me. I don't think there ever was a fellow in such a fix as I am in just now. Is it really true that you are without money?"

"It is as true and as real as the ground we are walking upon."

"Can you get it for me? I want fifty pounds; and if I don't get it, I shall be ruined, and another man who lent me money which was not his own will have to go to prison. I can't look that man in the face till I've got the money. Will you borrow it for me from Sir Jasper?"

"Not to save your life!" answered Blanche Harding resolutely. "I gave Arthur Holroyde three hundred pounds this morning in order that I might keep my position in Scarsdale Abbey. I am not such a besotted fool as to lose it by trying to borrow money of Sir Jasper; and he is the last man upon earth to lend it, if I were mad enough to ask him."

"There's Miss Denison! can't you ask Miss Denison?" gasped Gervoise hoarsely. He was in such utter need, so miserable, and so desperate, that he felt as if he could turn upon his sister and strangle her, if she persisted in refusing to help him.

"Miss Denison hates me, and would not give me sixpence to save me from starving," returned Mrs. Harding, who in her estimate of Marcia's feelings in such a hypothetical case may have been influenced by a knowledge of what would have been her own.

"I tell you again, that I *must* have the money!" her brother reiterated in a hoarse whisper.

"Then you must find it for yourself. I tell *you* again, that I have given my money to Arthur Holroyde. I gave it him a few hours ago—three hundred pounds in Bank-of-England notes. Ask him to give you some of it, if you like. He is an old friend of your father's; and you know what he is, and what chance you have of getting the money you want from him."

"I do," answered the lieutenant bitterly. And

then, after a little, he said in quite a different tone, "Three hundred pounds! Bank-notes for three hundred! And fifty would save me and another man from ruin! Good heavens! and if I go back to Roxborough, I shall have that fellow Dobb howling and snivelling about me every minute of my life. Caroline!"—he called his sister by the more familiar name when he was most excited,—"Caroline! if I don't get the money before to-night, I shall shoot myself between this and to-morrow morning."

"Before you do that, you had better try your chance with Arthur Holroyde. He might give you the money."

Gervoise Catheron turned upon his sister, deadly pale and with his lips twitching convulsively. "What do you mean by that?" he asked in the suppressed tone to which his voice had sunk as his passion intensified.

"I mean only what I say. To shoot yourself would be very horrible, and it is the last thing you can do. I had half made up my mind to drown myself once at Naples, when something

happened to prevent my doing it. Perhaps it would have been just as well for me if I had quite made up my mind. You may as well appeal to Arthur Holroyde before you blow out your brains. You can't do it afterwards."

Though it was Mrs. Harding's habit to look boldly into people's faces with her dark flashing eyes, she turned her head a little aside just now as she talked to her brother, and looked gloomily into the shadowy depths of fern and underwood. Philosopher and optimist though Sir Jasper was, he would scarcely have contemplated taking Blanche Harding for his wife if he could have seen her countenance at that moment.

"Why do you harp upon Arthur Holroyde and the money you have given him?" asked the lieutenant. "You know as well as I do that the man who would extort money from a woman—and above all women in the world from you—is just the last man upon earth to surrender a shilling of that money to help a poor devil out of his difficulties. You *must* remember that I always hated Holroyde—that he was insolent to me when

I was a boy; and when he hung about us, pretending to be my father's friend, and ensnaring you into an acquaintance so fatal to you since that time that the worst death which could have overtaken you in those early days would have been a blessed intervention of Heaven. He was insolent to me then, and savage in his way—for some men have a tigerish kind of politeness that is more savage than another man's brutality. He hated me, because I knew too much about his acquaintance with you, and the letters that passed between you unknown to my father; and I hated him and gave him back his insolence—Heaven knows why, perhaps because I had an instinctive knowledge that he was to be your most fatal enemy. You think because I am a scamp, and have led a scamp's life, that I am not to feel these things—that I am to have neither memory nor conscience. I tell you, Caroline, I would not take a shilling from that man as a gift, or as a loan even, to save me from the position I am in to-day. If I could grapple with him face to face and take the money from him by sheer force, and

then defy him to get it back from me, or to bring his baseness to the light of day by proclaiming how and of what he had been robbed, I would do it without hesitation. If I could get the money I want by begging in the highway, I would stand barefoot in the mud and beg; but I will not cringe to Arthur Holroyde. If there is some lingering spark of manhood involved in this determination, it is the last spark of manhood that is left in me, and it will only expire when I die."

Mrs. Harding made no response to this last part of her brother's speech. She cared so little about what he felt, or what he thought, that it is doubtful whether she ever heard any thing that he said relating to himself alone. One black and hideous thought absorbed her powers of thinking —one dark and horrible image filled her imagination: one chance of escape from the most miserable and degraded slavery that ever held a woman in bondage had flashed upon her mind within the last quarter of an hour. She had tried to put away the dreadful thought that there was such a chance of escape; she had tried to shut the horrible image

out of her brain. But once evoked, the phantom was not to be exorcised; it loomed upon her, a shadowy monster, like the ghost of Frankenstein's gigantic tormentor, and darkened all the universe with the blackness of its spectral form.

"Arthur Holroyde is not worth a fair fight," she said, answering one particular sentence in her brother's speech. "He is only fit for what you talked about just now: he ought to be shot as you would shoot a dog. However, we won't talk of him any more; he has taken my three hundred pounds, and he is happy. His smooth tongue has ingratiated him with Sir Jasper, and he dines here to-day. He has his horse with him; a fine showy chestnut, bought with my money, I daresay; and I suppose after dinner he will ride home with his plunder."

"What do you mean by home? where is his home?"

"He is staying at Marchbrooke with a Colonel Slingsby."

"Caroline," said the lieutenant, laying his hand suddenly on his sister's shoulder and plant-

ing her upon the spot where she stood, "I tell you for the last time that I am very desperate. Have you no jewels that you can dispose of? no friend you can appeal to? no possible means of getting me fifty pounds between this and Saturday night?"

"None," answered Mrs. Harding. "If you want the money, you must get it for yourself."

She said this as if there were some means of obtaining money available to her brother—some means known to her and to him, though not spoken of by either.

"God help you, Caroline, if any crime comes of your refusal!" cried Gervoise, as he released her, so roughly that she staggered away from him for two or three paces before she recovered herself. He had tried to see her face as he made his last appeal to her, but she had persistently averted it. He walked away now with no word of farewell, and made his way in hot haste back to Roxborough.

He had certain duties to do in the course of the day, and he struggled through them somehow

or other. At half-past five he went to the street in which the offices of Sloper and Halliday were situated, and loitered up and down the pavement smoking a cigar, and looking dismally every now and then towards the window of Mr. Dobb's apartment.

He had come to that street with the intention of seeing the brewer's-clerk, whose day's work always ended at six o'clock. But as the clock struck six Mr. Catheron threw away the end of his cigar and turned the corner of a narrow lane leading towards the open country. If a sheriff's-officer had been pursuing him, he could scarcely have walked faster than he did. He only stopped at last from sheer exhaustion. And when he did come to a standstill, he looked about him like a man who for the first time discovers which direction his steps have taken. He found himself in a flat swampy meadow on the bank of the Merdrid. There were cattle standing a few paces from him, staring at him with big stupid eyes, and straight before him, upon the low line of the western horizon, the sun was going down in a sea of blood.

"I couldn't face that fellow," muttered Gervoise Catheron; "I know I'm the meanest coward that ever trod this miserable earth; but I couldn't face him—I couldn't stand any more of his howling."

He stood so long in the same attitude staring at the darkening water that the staring cattle grew tired of watching him, or perhaps mistook him for some inanimate object looming darkly above the low swampy shore, and dropped their heavy heads to resume the slow munching of their evening meal. After standing thus for some ten or fifteen minutes, Gervoise Catheron turned suddenly and ran across the meadow on his way back to Castleford. He ran nearly all the way, entered the barracks unobserved, and went straight to his room. He locked his door before he went to a little table, on which there stood a mahogany pistol-case—not his own, or it would have been pawned, but left in his custody by a youngster in the regiment. The lieutenant unlocked this case, took out one of the pistols, examined the loading by touch rather than by sight, for the room was

almost dark, and then dropped it carefully into his pocket.

He made his way out of the barracks, for the officers were at mess. He heard their loud voices and the jingling of glass and silver as he went by the room where they were assembled, and thought —Heaven knows how bitterly—what a pleasant friendly gathering it was, and how happy the man must be who could join that cheery circle with a light heart and an untroubled conscience.

He went out of the gas-lighted passages into the gloomy dusk of the gathering night. As he crossed the barrack-yard he looked up to the quarter where the moon would have been, had there been any moon that night.

O God of heaven, had it come to this!—that it should be to his interest for the earth to be hidden in darkness—the darkness that could not cover him from the eye of his God, but might shroud his doings from the sight of his fellow-men!

CHAPTER VI.

"J'AI DU T'AIMER, JE DOIS TE FUIR!"

MARCIA DENISON remained in her own apartments throughout that day on which Mr. Holroyde made himself agreeable to Sir Jasper. That this man should be her father's guest—that he should exist for four-and-twenty hours under the same roof that sheltered her, filled her mind with a passionate indignation, against which she struggled in vain. Arthur Holroyde—the man whose baseness had blighted a good man's existence—the man whom Godfrey Pierrepoint had followed across the Atlantic, and tracked from city to city, from state to state, and who had yet gone scatheless—and now, after fifteen years, still lived, and still held his head erect before the face of his fellow-men, and dared to intrude himself upon honest people!

And this man came to the Abbey in the character of Mrs. Harding's friend. All Marcia's prejudices against the woman whom she had tried in vain to tolerate were intensified by the coming of Arthur Holroyde.

"Can I forget what Godfrey Pierrepoint's friend told him about this man?—that the slightest association with his name was death to a woman's reputation. And yet Mrs. Harding is so intimate with him that he comes here to visit her, and remains here as her friend."

Until now Marcia Denison had intended to stand aside, passive and uncomplaining, while her father allied himself to this woman, if it should please him to take her for his wife.

"Why should I interfere with his happiness?" she had thought; "I suppose he can only be happy in his own way, however strange or perilous the way may seem to me. I shall only have to seek another home; and my father's house has never been so much a home to me that I need feel the change very deeply."

It is not to be supposed that any set of people

so far-seeing as the Baronet's servants could remain blind to their master's infatuation. The state of Sir Jasper's affections had been freely discussed in the servants'-hall; and odds had been taken in the stables as to whether Mrs. Harding would become Lady Denison—or, in the *patois* of the groom species, whether the middle-aged filly would pull off the stakes. The general opinion of the household was, that the widow would prove a winner. This idea was by no means entirely pleasant; for the eye of a master, however penetrating, is purblind as compared to the eye of a mistress.

Mrs. Harding had been lavish in her donations to the Scarsdale servants; perhaps not altogether without some ulterior purpose.

"She's a deep one," said the chieftainess of the Abbey housemaids as she pocketed the widow's donation; "and she knows it's as well to be friends with such as me, for I could tell something about that beautiful complexion of hers, and the pink marks she leaves on the towels."

Mrs. Browning sighed plaintively as she con-

templated the handsome silk-dress which Sir Jasper's visitor had brought her from London. "It was very liberal of her," she murmured, "and quite the lady to make it a dress instead of money; but the Abbey won't be the Abbey, to my mind, if ever she comes to be mistress of it."

Dorothy ventured to give her mistress some hint of what was talked of in the housekeeper's room, where Dorothy took her tea with Mrs. Browning, Sir Jasper's own man, and the butler, and sometimes, by special invitation, the chieftainess of the housemaids.

"Papa is the best judge of whom he pleases to marry," Marcia had said quietly. "You must always remember that, Dorothy, when you hear him spoken of. Of course I am not so foolish as to think that he is not spoken of by his servants, or so proud as to dispute their right to talk of him, so long as they speak of him with the respect and friendliness of spirit that servants ought to feel for a good master. I know that there is nothing settled between papa and Mrs. Harding. He admires her very much, but he has admired other

people, and nothing has come of his admiration. However, it is just possible he may ask her to marry him."

"And I'm sure she would, Miss Marcia!" gasped the impetuous Dorothy.

"In that case I should leave Scarsdale, and have a house of my own at Brighton—or Bath—or Leamington—or Cheltenham—or some old-maid's paradise of that kind. And you should go with me, Dorothy, and by and by, when you married, your husband should be my butler: and I would give him the largest salary that ever an old-maid's butler had in this world, for my little favourite's sake."

Dorothy blushed crimson as she thought of Gervoise Catheron, and the impracticability of her kind mistress's scheme.

"He might be better off if he were a butler," she thought pensively, "and could have money to bet upon those dreadful horses, or would have nothing to do with them perhaps if he had plenty of money without betting. I'm sure there can't be any pleasure in going on as he and Henry

Adolphus go on about weight-for-ages, and platers, and Lord Edinbro, and Mr. Cheerful."

Dorothy brought her mistress some luncheon at two o'clock, and some strong tea at five. Marcia had no appetite; and the fiction of her not being well enough to dine with the family was supported by this fact. She sat alone reading throughout the day, too much disturbed to endure even Dorothy's society for any length of time.

She read until her head ached and her eyes grew dim and heavy. She felt that sense of weariness and oppression which a long day spent indoors is apt to produce in any one who is accustomed to be a good deal in the open air.

When the first dinner-bell rang, and Marcia knew that Mrs. Harding would be absorbed in the mysteries of her toilette, she left her room and went by a labyrinth of passages to the back staircase, at the foot of which there was a dark lobby that opened into her own garden—the dear old-fashioned garden sheltered by high walls, and almost forgotten by every one except herself and the gardener who attended to it. The evening air

blew freshly upon her as she emerged from the dark lobby, and the perfume of the early autumn flowers made the air odorous.

She had never entered this garden since the first days of her intimacy with Godfrey Pierrepoint without thinking of him, and that deserted garden in Yorkshire, which he had spoken of so regretfully. She was familiar with his story now, and could conjure up the vision of that other garden, and the figures that had once given it life and brightness. She saw the young mother bending over her toddling boy, and proud of his first ambitious footsteps. She saw the happy, innocent rustic home, the sweet Arcadian existence unspoiled by wealth, untrammelled by the duties of society. "And it is all so long ago," she thought. "When I remember the years that have passed away since that time, it seems as if nothing so long gone by could have been real. It seems as if it was only a dream that I have been told."

And then she thought of Godfrey Pierrepoint as he was now—the desolate, ruined man; ruined far more completely than the man who has lost

only lands and wealth, for those may be won twice in a lifetime; ruined by the destruction of a home —that sacred temple which, once shattered, can so rarely be built a second time. She thought of him, and wondered what his life had been since that solemn hour after the thunder-storm, when the sun had shone upon them standing side by side for the last, last time as he bade her farewell.

"He hailed that sudden sunburst as a good omen," she thought sadly; "as if there could be any good for us two upon this earth. When will another sun shine upon me and him standing side by side?"

She had been walking slowly along the smooth gravelled pathway between two prim hedges of box—hedges that can only be found in gardens that have seen more than one centenary; she had been walking with her head bent despondently; but at this moment she looked up suddenly, startled by a footfall on the gravel, and found herself face to face with Godfrey Pierrepoint in the autumn dusk.

That he should be there at all was very won-

derful to her; but there was nothing wonderful in the fact that he appeared before her at the very moment when his image occupied the chief place in her mind. Did not his image always reign supreme in her thoughts, shutting out all meaner things?

She grew very pale as she looked at him, moved unspeakably by the deep joy which his presence brought her. To see him once more, to touch his hand, to hear his voice—she would have given years of her dull empty life for so dear a privilege.

"I thought you had left England," she said. It was a very commonplace remark; but deep feeling generally shelters itself under commonplace phraseology.

"I have left England, and have come back. Oh, my dear love, I wanted to see you once more—for five minutes—only to say good-bye. We seemed to part so abruptly, that day after the storm. I was at St. Petersburg a week ago. I have come all the way from the banks of the Neva to bid you good-bye."

It must be confessed that Cupid in partnership with Plutus is a more powerful deity than the same god unaided and alone. Eros without the command of ready-money is the divinity without his pinions; but Eros the millionaire has an eagle's wings on his shoulders and Aladdin's lamp in his hand. Marcia Denison was weak enough to be touched to the very heart by the thought that this battered wanderer had come all the way from Russia to be five minutes in her presence. This was indeed such love as she had never hoped to win. And yet he might have loved her quite as dearly and have been powerless to communicate with her by any more romantic medium than the post. A little desperation goes a long way with a woman; and a wild midnight journey through Russian snows will sometimes produce a stronger effect upon a feminine heart than half a lifetime of patient devotion. The Derbys and Legers of Love are very apt to be won by a fluke.

For a few moments Marcia stood face to face with the man who loved her—the man whom she dared not think of in the character of a lover.

For a few moments she lost her self-command, so sweet was the knowledge that she was dear to him, so exquisite was the happiness she derived from his presence; and then she looked up at him with reproach in her sad earnest face.

"I am so sorry you should have come back," she said; "it was so wrong of you to return."

"I was mad and wicked, my own dear love. Ah, let me run riot in wickedness. I have only come back to you for five minutes. Take out your watch, Marcia; give me a quarter of an hour, and when the hand points to the quarter send me away. I will submit myself to you as meekly as a child."

Marcia did not look at her watch, but she was quite resolved to dismiss Mr. Pierrepoint in a quarter of an hour—perhaps to allow him even less grace.

She thought that he must have something special to say to her—some communication to make that might in a measure redeem the folly of his journey; but he walked by her side in silence. It seemed as if to be near her was in

itself a reward for all the fatigue of his mad scamper across civilised Europe.

"Marcia," said Godfrey Pierrepoint, "you must think me mad for having come back to you like this. You will have better reason for such a conclusion when I tell you why I have returned. Do you believe in dreams, Marcia? I have shut my mind against all belief in them, though on remembering the shadows of the night, I have often been tempted to perceive a prophetic significance interwoven with their obscurity. But since I left this place my sleep has been haunted by your image, until my waking became unendurable. Night after night, night after night I have seen you; and amid all the foolish confusion of my dreams that one image has appeared distinct and unchangeable—always beckoning, always entreating my return. Ah, Marcia, I know the image was only a lying shadow. The demons of medieval superstition were wont to take the fair form of a Christian knight's own true love when they wanted to lure him to his ruin; and his fortitude underwent a terrible trial before he could

bring himself to lift his ponderous sword and smite the cherished image wherein the foul fiend had sheltered himself. I tried to remember this, Marcia; I tried to remember that the vision of my dreams had no relation to your real self. While I saw you pale and tearful, supplicating me with shadowy outstretched arms, you were tranquil and happy perhaps, with no more constant prayer upon your lips than that which besought forgetfulness of me and of my folly."

"No, Godfrey, not happy; tranquil, perhaps, but never happy."

It was the first time that she had called him by his own name. He turned to her suddenly; her eyes had grown accustomed to the autumn dusk, and she saw his face distinctly, and knew how deeply her pronunciation of that name had affected him.

"No one has called me by my name since my mother put her arms round my neck as she wished me good-bye in the garden at Pierrepoint," he said in a low voice. "I have nothing more to tell you, Marcia, now I have told the foolish cause of my

return. I went further and further northwards, for I had a fancy for exploring the steppes of Russia, and following the footsteps of Muscovite civilisation to the confines of China. There is a new world for me out yonder—and I shall not return to Europe till I know Central Asia as well as I know the shores of the Niger and the Nile. I travelled very slowly when I left England after that sad day in which we parted; it seemed so hard to go further and further away from you; so I lingered here and loitered there, dawdling and dreaming by day and night, and in every stage of my journey doing battle afresh with the tempter, who urged me to come back to you, if only to see your face—if only to touch your hand once more in my weary life. I had reached St. Petersburg when my courage failed. To such a hardened traveller as I am the journey from one end of Europe to the other was scarcely worth consideration. One day, when my dreams of the preceding night had been more vivid than usual, I was seized with a feverish unrest. I had made all the arrangements for the Asiatic expedition,

and was waiting in dreary idleness for favourable weather for my start. Better, I thought, to spend that weary interval in a hurried flight hitherward. I have returned in secret, leaving my servant behind me; and no one but you and the old woman at the Hermitage will know of my coming. I arrived in the early morning, and have lain in wait for the dusk ever since, trusting to some happy accident to afford me an opportunity of seeing you. I knew this garden was your favourite walk in the twilight, and I had been in ambush behind the yews for half an hour before I heard the dear-familiar footstep and the rustling of the silken dress."

While he was speaking, the thought of Arthur Holroyde's presence at Scarsdale had flashed upon Marcia. Until then she had forgotten every thing in the surprise and agitation that had come upon her. But now all at once she understood the danger that might arise from any meeting between Holroyde and the man he had injured. Would Godfrey, who had sought his wife's betrayer from one end of America to the other, be

satisfied to let him go scatheless if Providence flung them together? An icy terror benumbed Marcia Denison's heart.

"O God," she thought, "if they should meet!" She put her hand to her forehead, trying to calculate the chances for and against such a meeting. Mrs. Harding's visitor might come out upon the terrace at any moment; and his voice might be heard in the still evening calling to the groom who held his horse, or making his last adieux. The two men might pass each other in the darkness unrecognised and in safety; but any chance utterance of the visitor's name by grooms or stable-boys might reveal his neighbourhood and bring about some fatal encounter.

The days of duelling are past and gone, it may be; but men contrive to kill one another occasionally, nevertheless; and it is not so long since a corpse was carried out of a field in Berkshire, to lie stark and bloody in a darkened chamber at the Barley Mow. The fly-drivers of Windsor point to the green hollow where the victim fell, and relate how quietly the gentlemen

alighted from their vehicle and walked across the pleasant meadow. Can the practice of duelling be ever entirely extinct while men have human passions and a human impatience of insupportable insult and injury?

"If they meet, there will be some deadly harm," thought Marcia: "I have not forgotten how Godfrey wrote of his enemy only a few months ago. The old wounds had not ceased to bleed. O God, keep these two men asunder, for I know there would be peril in their meeting."

The pause was very brief during which Miss Denison thought all this. Godfrey walked silently by her side in the darkness; it seemed to him enough happiness to be with her. She turned to him presently and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Pray go!" she exclaimed. "You had no right to come back. I have forborne from reproaching you, for I cannot regret it now since it gives me the opportunity of asking you a favour."

"A favour, Marcia! You—will ask any thing of me! Why, that would give my dreary life a kind of charm!"

"You talked just now of taking that terrible journey through Central Asia. Promise me that you will abandon the idea."

"I would rather you asked me any thing else in the world. Do you forget, Marcia, that henceforth there is nothing left for me in life but perilous journeys, and the exploration of solitudes that are new to me? I want to see Schamyl's fortresses. I want to beat up a new territory. Remember that I have been fifteen years a wanderer. Abyssinia is as stale to me as Oxford Street. You send me away from Scarsdale, Marcia; don't deny me Circassia and the Chinese Wall."

"I shall be miserable, knowing you are in danger," said Marcia, in a low voice. She felt that she had no right to say so much as this. But then talking to a man on the eve of a life-long exile is like talking to a man on his death-bed. "I think if my image haunted your dreams, it must have been because I was tortured night and day by fears for your safety," she added softly.

"You were tortured for me; you suffered for

my sake! Oh, my own dear love, I will promise any thing in the world rather than cause you unhappiness."

"Promise then that you will not leave Europe."

"I promise."

"A thousand thanks! And now go. You will leave Scarsdale the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Yes, Marcia, to return to St. Petersburg, where I shall spend the winter. And now farewell. Forgive the folly that has brought me to you, and forget, if possible, that you have seen m[redacted]ood-bye, good-bye. God be with you, best and noblest of women!"

He held both her hands in his, and bent his head over them reverently as he said this. Then he turned and left her; and she heard his firm step upon the gravel-walks as she stood listening in the darkness.

The stable-clock struck the half-hour after seven as she waited between the gnarled espaliers. When the footsteps were quite out of hearing, she walked along the pathway to the stout wooden door by which Godfrey Pierrepoint had left the

garden. She opened this door and stood within its threshold still listening. The last yellow light of the departed sun had died out in the west, and the evening star shone fair and bright above the solemn woods. The September night was still and warm. Miss Denison emerged from her garden upon the broad gravelled drive that approached the steps leading to the terrace. She ascended these steps and walked past the lighted windows of the dining-room, where the curtains were very rarely drawn in warm weather. One glance within showed her Mr. Holroyd [redacted] opposite the Baronet at the round table. [redacted] for the present there could be little chance of a meeting between Godfrey Pierrepoint and his enemy.

"Thank God!" thought Marcia. "If he goes straight back to the Hermitage, no harm need come of this mad return. Heaven keep him from wandering about the wood to-night!"

She looked up at the purple sky, very calm and beautiful in its profound depth of colour. Venus had summoned her brothers and sisters out of the blue darkness, and the light of a thou-

sand stars shimmered upon the leaves and made a faint silvery brightness upon the grass. Marcia felt sorry that the night should be so beautiful. It was such a night as would beguile an erratic person into lonely wanderings in silvan glades, among the dewy fern.

"If they met face to face in the broad open country, they might recognise each other by this starlight," thought Marcia; "but the wood about the Hermitage will be as black as the bottom of a grave."

She entered the house by one of the French windows of her father's study, and went upstairs to her own sitting-room — the room in which Godfrey Pierrepoint had contemplated her portrait more than a year before. A shaded lamp had been placed by the pile of books she had left on her table, but she did not take her usual place under the lamplight. She seated herself by one of the windows, and looked out at the distant woods. Seated here, she could hear the voices in the rooms below. Mrs. Harding and Arthur Holroyde came out upon the terrace by

and by, followed by the Baronet, who was tenderly reminded of the perils of cold night-air. But the widow was not quite her gushing self this evening, and Marcia wondered why she was so quiet.

Mr. Holroyde's horse was brought to the steps at the eastern end of the terrace at about half-past eight. Miss Denison watched him as he mounted and rode away, looking backwards and waving a white hand airily as he disappeared round the circular sweep of the drive. Looking down at the figures on the terrace, Marcia saw the widow sitting in a moody attitude, with her folded arms resting on the stone balustrade. Sir Jasper spoke to her twice before she raised her drooping head and replied to him.

"Is there any misunderstanding between papa and her?" wondered Miss Denison. "Surely his eyes will be opened as to her real character before he commits himself to any foolish declaration."

But Marcia's mind was not long occupied by her father's enchantress. Whom could she think of to-night but Godfrey Pierrepoint?

About a quarter of an hour after Arthur Holroyde had disappeared with that airy wave of his delicate hand, a shot sounded far away in the stillness of the wood.

"Good heavens, how foolish I am!" thought Marcia, after she had started to her feet pale and trembling; "that sound made my heart grow cold, though I have heard a hundred times that the wood is infested by poachers, who defy the keepers, knowing very well that papa won't prosecute them. Some poor creature whose wife and children are half-starving fired that shot, I daresay."

Miss Denison had been accustomed to be startled by stray shots almost every evening of late—shots which Dorothy explained as "Poachers, please, Miss Marcia; and father says if Sir Jasper isn't more severe with them, there won't be any birds left by and by; for they shoot the young birds, Miss Marcia, and wire the young hares, and go on dreadfully."

"If I sit idle here any longer," thought Marcia, "I shall be full of nervous fancies."

So she went to the lamp-lit table, and opened her books. It is something for a woman to be a little bit of a blue-stocking when the hour of trouble comes upon her. A parcel of new books had come down from Dulau that afternoon, and Marcia had some volumes of classic history and biography to dip into, written in that light airy manner with which Frenchmen can handle the heaviest subjects. She tried to concentrate her attention upon her book, and succeeded so far as to get through the evening somehow or other. She was even astonished when she looked up at the little timepiece on the mantelshelf, and saw that the hands pointed to half-past eleven. She was dawdling over the putting away of her books and papers, glad to do any thing that occupied the time and would help to shorten a sleepless night, when she was startled by the trampling of footsteps, the ringing of half-a-dozen different bells, and the sound of many voices all talking at once.

She rushed out into the corridor, and thence to the broad landing at the top of the principal

staircase, where she met Dorothy flying towards her, pale and breathless.

"What is the matter? Speak, child, speak!" she cried, grasping the girl's arm.

"Oh, Miss Marcia—don't be frightened! It's —it's very dreadful, but it's nothing wrong with your papa—or any body you know—but the—the gentleman who was here to-day has been found in the wood—shot—and he's being brought in here, miss, dead or dying; and they're riding off for doctors right and left. And Mrs. Brownlow is almost beside herself with fright. It's—it's like it was that dreadful night, Miss Marcia, when poor Miss Denison was dying, and nobody seemed calm or able to do any thing quietly, except you."

"Yes," murmured Marcia in a faint voice, "I remember that night; and God grant I may be strong enough to be useful now, if any help can save this miserable man! Where have they carried him, Dorothy?"

"Into the study, miss. Sir Jasper said he wasn't to be moved a step farther than was

necessary. The servants were all crowding about the door, and I just caught a glimpse of the poor gentleman lying on a sofa that had been brought out of the drawing-room, and looking as white and still as a corpse; but Sir Jasper sent us all away, and shut the door; and every body is to go to bed, Mrs. Brownlow says, except Mary Carter, Mr. Hills, and the men who have gone for the doctor."

Mr. Hills was Sir Jasper's own man, and a model of sobriety and solemnity. This gentleman had had so much experience in the nursing of invalids who ailed nothing, that he was almost as good as a doctor.

Throughout the remainder of that night, Marcia kept watch alone in her own room, while Dorothy slumbered peacefully in her little chamber nigh at hand. All that miserable night Marcia sat in the old-fashioned window, ready to help if her help were wanted below, and praying in her heart of hearts for Godfrey Pierrepoint, by whose hand she believed the stricken man had fallen.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSHINE FOR MR. DOBB.

THE next day was Friday, and Friday loomed a black and gloomy day for Henry Adolphus Dobb, who evidenced so morose a disposition at the domestic breakfast-table, that he drew down upon himself figuratively-worded reproaches to the effect that he had arisen from the wrong side of his bed, and was afflicted with a pain in his temper.

Perhaps there is no repast more apt to become weary to the spirit and revolting to the appetite than the dismal meal with which the Englishman with limited means fortifies himself for his day's work. The Parisian may have three courses and a dessert in the Palais-Royal for something under fifteenpence, or in quaint little streets on the other side of the Seine, for some-

thing under fivepence. The French peasant in the provinces may have a basin of some mysterious soup, which at the least is savoury, or a bunch of grapes with his hunch of bread, or a pocketful of yellow pears, or a lettuce steeped in oil, and a slice of hard cheese. He may vary his humble *menu* with the changing seasons, and may warm himself with a soup in winter, and refresh himself with a fruit in summer, and may impart a patrician tone to his repast at all times by the consumption of a liquor that is at any rate called wine. But the wife of a British clerk with an income of a hundred and twenty pounds per annum thinks she has done her duty to her husband when she has placed before him a stale half-quartern, considerably adulterated with alum, a doubtful French egg boiled hard, and a pat of indifferent butter. And then she sits glaring at him sternly across a dingy British-metal pot of weak tea—that never was grown in China, and whose ghostly resemblance to tea is washed out of it by an immoderate allowance of boiling water: and if he does not do justice to the goods

his domestic gods have provided for him, she asks sharply why he doesn't "make" a good breakfast.

"I don't know what has come to you, Henry Adolphus, for the last few days," exclaimed Selina, as her husband pushed away an untasted egg. "You've been *that* dull and *that* cross that there's been no bearing you. And as to turning up your nose at an egg because it tastes a little of the straw, it's mere daintiness now that eggs are only fourteen a shilling, and will be dearer between this and Christmas."

"I don't like undeveloped chickens," answered the clerk moodily, "though your proclivities may lie in that direction. I think you might have got me a bloater by this time, knowing I'm fond of 'em; but never mind: 'I likes to be despised,' as the gentleman says in the play. And now I'm off to the office. So fare thee well; and if for ever—still for ever, et cetera, et cetera:

> 'My boat is on the shore,
> And my bark is on the sea;
> But before I go, Tom Moore,
> Here's a double health to thee.'

Why the gentleman required a boat *and* a bark is

more than I can underconstumble, unless the bark was for the accommodation of that favourite dog of his that he made such a row about," said Mr. Dobb, whose lively wit was not to be quite extinguished by the gloom of despair.

He went to his office presently, brooding darkly upon Gervoise Catheron's treachery, and determined to devote the leisure of his dinner-hour to the hunting out of that gentleman.

"He fought shy of me all yesterday," thought the clerk, "which proves that it was a case of *non andire* with the party he expected to tip up. I saw him hanging about Sloper and Halliday's before I left the office, but when I got out he'd bolted. If I don't get that money between now and to-morrow night, I shall have to cut this place, and that means ruin. Your swells, like Catheron, can manage to live without a character; but who'll help me if I run away, leaving fifty pounds deficient in the safe I had charge of?"

Mr. Dobb made his way to the office with a slow step and a very rueful countenance. The facetious salutation of a lively junior was distaste-

ful to him, though the youthful wit had founded himself on his superior. Henry Adolphus groaned aloud as he hung up his hat, struck by the stoutness of the peg on which he hung it, and which might be a convenient thing to hang himself upon before Saturday night. He walked to his desk with a listless step, and seated himself languidly upon his stool. A heap of letters awaited his inspection—small orders from rustic publicans, excuses from recalcitrant vendors of beer to be drunk on the premises, and so on. He opened them with a mechanical air, and folded each letter lengthwise after reading it, with the envelope inside; for Mr. Dobb was a good man of business; though he did talk of underconstumbling where a rational person would have talked of understanding. He went to work to-day in his usual orderly manner, though his brain was disturbed by the vision of an infuriated employer; but when he came to the last but one of his letters, he grew excited all at once, and tore open the envelope with feverish haste; for that envelope was addressed to Mr. Dobb, and the word *Private* was written above the

seal, on the very spot which a sacrilegious thumb must approach if it would tear open the envelope, across the very threshold of the temple as it were. The hand that had written both address and warning inscription was the hand of Gervoise Catheron.

"Another excuse," thought Mr. Dobb with a suppressed groan.

But in the next instant the clerk's face became suddenly radiant. There was no letter in the envelope, which contained only one oblong slip of flimsy paper: and the oblong slip of paper was a fifty-pound note.

Henry Adolphus waited just long enough to convince himself that the note was not some base and spurious counterfeit upon the Bank of Love, or the Bank of Elegance, before he alighted from his stool and executed an elaborate cellar-flap breakdown upon the floor of the office. The junior clerk, who was unaccustomed to such a manifestation from his superior during business hours, looked round, like King Jamie when he perused the confessions of ill-fated sorcerers, "in a wonderful admiration"

"I'll tell you what it is, Sparkins," said Mr. Dobb: "it isn't often that I indulge in the cup that cheers and is very likely to inebriate; but I made a very bad breakfast this morning, and I find myself in the last stage of seediness. So you just slip round to the tap and get a pot of the best double-brown, and then slip across to Codgers's for a pork-pie. Nature abhors a vacuum, and I've got a feeling of emptiness that nothing less than half a sixteenpenny pork will assuage. Tell Codgers I don't mind kittens, as long as they're healthy kittens; but measly felines are too much for my feelin's. You owe me one for that, I flatter myself, Sparkins.—And now the venerable proprietor of this location may come home as soon as he likes. 'Richard's himself again!'" soliloquised Mr. Dobb, as he took the business-like precaution of inscribing the number of the fifty-pound note in a little pocket-book, in which there were other numbers. After having done this, he opened the iron safe and put the note into a cash-box where there were notes and gold to some amount.

"The astute old party will be flummuxed by

the sight of that note," muttered the clerk, pausing in the act of locking the cash-box. "I haven't taken any thing above ten pounds since he's been gone; for he takes jolly good care that the big cheques all come to his net. He'll ask me a lot of questions about that fifty pounds, *aussi certain que les œufs sont les œufs*," exclaimed the clerk, who, when his spirits were especially gay, was apt to indulge in literal translations of his pet phrases, and would proclaim himself *en haut du tabac*, or demand playfully whether his friends could perceive *de vert dans son œil*.

"It's rather awkward," thought Henry Adolphus; "but I've got the money, that's the grand point, and I must fudge-up some story for the governor. Or perhaps the better plan would be to take the money round to young Halliday before four o'clock this afternoon, and get him to pay it into the bank. It'll save the young swell a lecture; and he'd never think of taking a note of any thing but the gross amount he pays in."

Having arrived at this determination, Mr. Dobb became quite easy in his mind; and when

his junior reëntered the office, bearing a pewter vessel of foaming porter, a very brown pie, with a couple of plates and knives, neatly arranged on a small tray, Henry Adolphus took off his coat in order to enjoy himself thoroughly.

"We're pretty slack this morning, Sparkins," said he; "but you may as well turn that key, so that we mayn't have any intrusive cove walking in upon us while we're taking our refresh*mong; consommation*, I saw it inscribed over a *caffy* when I was in Boulogne; but how can you expect any thing but queer ideas about language from a nation that calls hats and bonnets confectionery? Make yourself at home, Sparkins. But, on the other hand, remember the injunction of the immortal Sairey, who, by the way, was not unlike your mother. Don't be savage, Sparkins; because if you give way to angry feelings you'll choke yourself. Indignation and pork-pie cannot dwell together, as the poet remarked apropos to youth and age. You may not take my allusion to your maternal parent as a compliment, but it was meant in kindness."

When a young gentleman of sixteen regales himself at the expense of a gentleman of seven-and-twenty, he must expect to be trampled upon. If the junior clerk was angered by his superior's discourse, he drowned his anger in brown-stout.

"There's such a lot of people over at Codgers's," he said; "and they're in a fine state of excitement. I suppose you heard the news as you came down to the office?"

"What news?" cried Mr. Dobb. "A blessed lot of news *I* could have heard, seeing that I didn't speak to a creature between this and home!"

"What! you haven't heard, then?"

"No; don't I tell you, stoopid!"

The junior clerk's heart thrilled with a sense of triumph. It was not often that he obtained any advantage over his senior. But to be able to impart an important piece of local intelligence to that gentleman, was in a manner to get the better of him. Henry Adolphus felt himself humiliated, but he was too great a creature to succumb before an inferior.

"Come," he said sharply, reassuming the tone

of the master, "clear up those bits of fat, and put the tray in the corner over there. We can't have too much of this sort of thing in business hours," added the clerk, as if the pork-pie luncheon had been a suggestion of the junior's, rather than a weakness of the great Dobb himself. "Turn that key in the lock, and get back to your desk like one o'clock."

The clerk mounted his own stool as he spoke, and began to write noisily with a very hard quill-pen.

"Now then," he exclaimed in his most careless manner, after writing busily for about five minutes, "what's this row over at Codgers's?"

The junior had been cheated out of his triumph. He had anticipated the delight of astonishing the mighty Dobb; and behold, that master mind demanded his story as if it had been the recitation of a lesson. The whole affair was flat and tame, and Mr. Sparkins imparted his news in quite a subdued manner.

"There's been a gentleman shot in Scarsdale Wood," he said; "a gentleman who dined with Sir Jasper yesterday, and left the Abbey to ride

home last night between eight and nine. And he was found by some men who were going through the wood at eleven o'clock, and they carried him home to the Abbey, and he isn't expected to live."

"Who shot him?" asked Mr. Dobb sternly.

"That's just what nobody knows; poachers, perhaps; there are lots of 'em always prowling about Scarsdale after dark at this time of year. And there's a talk that the gentleman had money about him."

"Who was—or who is the gentleman?"

"Mr.—Mr. Holford I think they called him."

"Humph! I haven't the honour of his acquaintance."

"He was visiting at Marchbrooke, they say."

"Ah," exclaimed the clerk, with supreme indifference, "I daresay. Of course there'll be all sorts of false reports about. I shall hear the rights and wrongs of the story from my wife's cousin, Dorothy Tursgood, who is quite a confidential companion of Miss Denison's. I shall get my information from head-quarters, Sparkins, and I'll let you know all about this business to-morrow."

Utterly crushed by the patronage of his superior, the junior clerk went on with his work—copying figures out of one book into another book, and ruling double lines with red ink. Mr. Dobb took advantage of his dinner-time to carry the cash-box to Mr. Halliday's house, which was a pleasant old Georgian mansion in a lane where the towers of the cathedral made a perpetual coolness with their dark and solemn shadows. Mr. Halliday was a gay young bachelor; and the clerk found him lolling on a sofa with a cigar in his mouth and a French novel in his hand; but an open treatise on algebra and a desk on the table near him went to show that he had at least been making some attempt at study.

"How do, Dobb?" he said. "Sit down and make yourself at home. Nothing wrong at the shop, I hope?"

"No, sir; it's all—correct." Henry Adolphus had almost shaped the syllables 'serene,' but pulled himself up in deference to his employer, who was a very young man, and talked slang, but not Mr. Dobb's slang.

"I brought round the cash-box, sir," said the clerk, placing the precious casket on Mr. Halliday's table, "thinking you might like to pay in the rhi—ready-money, before the—Mr. Sloper came home. It might look more the chee—business-like, you know, sir; for there's over a hundred there, and Mr. Sloper—"

"Oh, yes, I understand. He would have read me a lecture for not looking after things at the office; and you've brought me this money to save me a scrape. It's very friendly of you, Dobb; and I'm much obliged. Have some claret and seltzer; it's capital stuff for this weather. You'll find a jar of the genuine Nassau in that cupboard, and a bottle of decent St. Julien; and if you ring the bell, I daresay they can get us a lump of ice."

But Mr. Dobb declined to avail himself of his employer's hospitality. He was anxious to get back to the office, he said. On any other occasion he would have been very glad to drink claret and seltzer with the dashing young Halliday; not that he particularly cared about claret and seltzer —but because it would have been such a delight-

ful thing to have boasted of his intimacy with his employer, to the humiliation of his own circle. To-day he felt like an impostor, for he had come to Mr. Halliday in order to get out of his own difficulty, and not with an unselfish desire to oblige that gentleman. But the junior partner thrust a handful of choice cigars upon the clerk in his desire that he might get some reward for his trouble, and Dobb departed from the Georgian mansion, and emerged out of the shadow of the cathedral towers, enriched but remorseful.

He found every one in Roxborough full of that dark deed which had been done in Scarsdale Wood; and every body of any importance had his own theory of the case, and was obstinately deaf to the argument of any body who advanced any other theory. Henry Adolphus delighted his wife by the cheerfulness of his spirit that evening as he lingered over his tea, and was not altogether unmoved himself by the silent evidence of a wife's love and duty, which he found between two plates on the tea-table, in the shape of a very fine bloater.

"It's a soft roe, Henry Adolphus," said Mrs. Dobb; "I thought you'd like a relish with your cup of tea. And I got a crusty twopenny of to-day's bake on purpose for you," added the dutiful wife as she cut a slice from a stale half-quartern for her own consumption.

Mr. and Mrs. Dobb discussed the outrage in Scarsdale Wood at length as they sat over their tea; and after the tray had been removed, Miss Pennekit's dress was neglected while Selina wrote to her cousin Dorothy, beseeching that young lady to take tea at Amanda Villas on the following evening.

"I am sure Miss Denison will let you come," wrote Mrs. Dobb, "and *of course* Mr. Catheron will see you home."

"Won't he though!" exclaimed the clerk as he perused this sentence in his wife's letter. "I expect he will drop in this evening—as large as life; and I hope you'll do the civil to him, 'Lina, and not show your teeth as you did the last time he was here, for he's behaved very well to me in a little transaction we've had lately."

"What!" cried the alarmed Selina, "you haven't been lending him money I hope, Henry Adolphus?"

"Well, I did lend him a few pounds; but he has acted on the square, and it's all serene."

Mr. Dobb had not forgotten the I O U's which he held for his lost thirty pounds, but he fondly believed that Gervoise would eventually find the money to redeem those documents, as he had done when hard driven for the still more pressing debt.

Selina promised to be civil to the sub-lieutenant whenever he appeared. But Mr. Catheron did not drop in that evening, as the clerk had expected him to do.

CHAPTER VIII.

NUMBER 69669.

THE family surgeon and another surgeon—a mighty master of his awful science, who had been summoned from London by telegram—held a consultation in the yellow drawing-room at the Abbey as to the state of Mr. Arthur Holroyde, lying on his impromptu bed in the darkened and silent chamber where the grim Neptune drove his sea-horses above the index of time.

The two surgeons had no very satisfactory account to give of their patient. He had been shot in the back, and the bullet had gone through the lungs. This was the gist of what the surgeons stated, though they shrouded the dismal truth in a hazy atmosphere of technicalities. There had been cases in which men had survived the perforation of the lungs by a bullet, and had

lived to be strong and hearty again; but these cases were few, so few that the London surgeon was able to give Sir Jasper a catalogue of them as he discussed the state of his patient.

"I shall remain here for to-night, since you wish me to do so," said the great man; "for I will not conceal from you the fact that the case is critical, very critical, and I doubt if my worthy coadjutor has had much experience of such cases. My people will telegraph to me if I am urgently wanted in London, and I shall go back by an early train—in time for my consultations. In the mean time I shall be on the spot to watch for any change in the symptoms."

"Let every thing that is within the compass of medical science be done for this gentleman," said Sir Jasper; "he is neither my friend nor my kinsman; but he has been my guest, and was on his homeward way from my house when he was struck by his assassin. I scarcely know whether I am most anxious for the preservation of his life, or the discovery of his treacherous assailant."

André Chenier called the classic goddess of vengeance a "*Némésis tardive;*" but modern justice is rarely slow of foot. The clerk at Roxborough station, who telegraphed the message that summoned the great surgeon, telegraphed another message that was carried straight to the chiefs of Scotland Yard; and before the surgeon had left his consulting-room in Cavendish Square, a detective officer was on his way to Roxborough, to hold solemn conference with the local police and to begin his work forthwith. Of course he proceeded without loss of time to the Abbey, stopping to inspect the scene of the murder on his way; the spot where the gentleman's horse had been found neighing dismally, and the other spot where the gentleman himself was discovered lying on his face, and leading up to which there was a trail, which showed how the gentleman had been dragged some yards before his foot disengaged itself from the stirrup. At the Abbey, the detective honoured Mrs. Brownlow with a hearing, and received from that lady the contents of Arthur Holroyde's pockets. After in-

specting these, the official waited on Sir Jasper Denison. "I think I have got at the motive of the attack, sir," he said, "and that's something. Did you know that the gentleman had a considerable sum of money about him?"

"No, I am quite ignorant of his affairs."

"Well, he had, sir. Three hundred pounds in bank-notes; I've found the numbers of the notes in his pocket-book, with the date of their receipt. They were received yesterday."

"That is quite impossible," answered Sir Jasper; "Mr. Holroyde never quitted my house yesterday until he left it in the evening. There must be a mistake in the date."

"Well, there may be, sir; but I should fancy from the look of the gentleman's pocket-book, that he was a very methodical par—person. We're obliged to look into papers and letters, and such like, you see, sir, without leave or license when a gentleman has been all but murdered, and doesn't know who attacked him. I suppose there was no one in your house, sir, likely to pay Mr. Holroyde money."

"Most decidedly not."

"Do you think he received the notes by post?"

"No; he could receive no letter in this house, for his presence here was accidental."

"Well then, sir, I suppose the date must be wrong. You see it's a little pocket-book, with the pages divided for every day in the year, and in the division that's dated September 16, Thursday, there's the entry about this three hundred, and the numbers of the notes in a very clear handwriting. Well, sir, I'm inclined to think the gentleman had these notes upon him when he was shot. Your housekeeper had the good sense not to meddle with his clothes when they were taken off him, and I found his waistcoat-pocket pulled inside out. It's pretty likely the notes were in that very pocket. Your housekeeper tells me she can swear to the pocket being like that when the gentleman was brought in. It's tolerably clear to my mind that the gentleman had the notes, and that they were taken from him after he was shot. If it was so, we

oughtn't to have much difficulty in getting at the individual who did it, unless he's an old hand and has sent the notes abroad. You might dispose of a million of money that way, and not have it traced home to you very easily. However, I don't think the gentleman was shot by an old hand. It's more likely to have been done by some country yokel, and if so we shall be down upon him before he has time to get rid of his plunder. I've had a look at the place where the business happened, and there's a hollow amongst the fern that looks as if a man had been lying in wait there for some hours. I think I can about guess the build of the man by the shape of that hollow, and if I'm right, he wasn't a very big fellow. A youngster perhaps! It's rather like a youngster's business this."

Sir Jasper listened gravely to the detective. There are occasions on which the most inveterate *persifleur* is fain to be serious. Voltaire was very much in earnest when he busied himself with rehabilitation of Calas; and Horace

Walpole was quite serious when he pleaded for unlucky Admiral Byng.

"I beg that you will offer a reward of a hundred pounds—to be paid by me—for the apprehension of the wretch who committed this outrage," said the Baronet. "The gentleman was my guest; and if his life cannot be saved, I am bound to see that his death is avenged. I have made inquiries respecting his friends, and find that he stands quite alone in the world, or, at any rate, that there is no one he would care to have summoned to his bedside."

This was all that Sir Jasper had to say to the detective, who retired very well pleased with his mission, which promised to be a profitable one; for it was more than likely that he, and he alone, would touch the reward so liberally offered.

Dorothy accepted her cousin's invitation, and duly presented herself at Amanda Villas on the afternoon of that Saturday to which the clerk had looked forward with such terror. It was

not a time for tea-drinkings or junkettings. There was a solemn hush in the chambers of Scarsdale Abbey, and an odour as of a tanyard pervaded the atmosphere about the mansion; for oak bark was strewn a foot thick on the broad carriage-drive, and the gig of the local surgeon, and the fly which conveyed the great practitioner from London, rolled noiselessly as on velvet. It was not a time for tea-drinking, for Arthur Holroyde lay in Sir Jasper's study hovering between life and death — and oh so much nearer death than life; and Dorothy was fain to pretend some solemn engagement of long standing when she asked permission to visit her cousin.

That permission, however, was very readily granted by Miss Denison.

"Yes, go by all means, my dear," she said; "it will be good for you to be away from this dreadful house."

So Dorothy left the Abbey after an early dinner with her friend and patroness, Mrs. Browning, who was much grander and more condescending in her manner than Marcia De-

nison. Under ordinary circumstances Dorothy would have been the last person in the world to leave that silent house for any tea-drinking, for her heart was tender and compassionate, and she had lain awake for some time in the two last nights thinking what a dreadful thing it would be if Mr. Holroyde were to die; and had prayed to the holy Mother and all manner of saints and angels for his recovery, in her simple childish way—just as she would have entreated an earthly mother and earthly friends. But she was in love—it was for the love of Gervoise Catheron that she went to Roxborough this September afternoon. Had not Selina promised that he should escort her home? Of course that implied that he was to be of the tea-party. And she wanted so much to see him, and to hear his troubles; to know whether he had been able to pay that cruel tobacconist, or to appease the wrath of the pitiless tailor who was so unjustifiably angry at being cheated out of his goods and labour. She wanted to see him. This love of hers was all suffering, and yet she wanted to suffer more.

The tender heart was ready to bleed anew, whenever the ruthless god should be pleased to plant fresh arrows in the faithful breast.

But a disappointment awaited poor Dorothy at Amanda Villas. She found the little parlour very neat, and an elegant repast of muffins and water-cresses adorning the table. There were no vestiges of Miss Pennekit's dress, which had been carried home in a cotton handkerchief early that afternoon to be worn by Miss Pennekit on the following Sabbath, with a view to the utter annihilation of her particular friends during church service. Mr. Dobb was radiant, for Sloper had returned early in the afternoon, and had been much gratified by the clerk's account of business during his absence, and with the sharpness that had distinguished that gentleman's proceedings *in re* certain doubtful customers of the firm. But there was no Gervoise Catheron. Poor Dorothy scalded herself with boiling tea, and nearly choked herself with muffin from sheer mortification of spirit.

"I thought, perhaps, Gervoise might be here,"

she ventured to whisper to Selina presently, with a piteous assumption of indifference. Whereon Selina told her that Henry Adolphus had not set eyes upon Mr. Catheron since Wednesday night, but that he—the lieutenant—was expected to drop in at any moment.

"You know how very intimate he is with Dobb," said Selina, "let alone his being likely to see you here. It's not often three days go by without our seeing him."

"I hope—there's—nothing the matter with him," faltered Dorothy, across whose vivid imagination there flitted a vision of nearly all the sudden calamities that can afflict humanity.

"Why, what should be the matter with him?" exclaimed Selina. "I shall think you don't like the muffins, Dorothy, if you don't make a better tea. Give your cousin some of those creases, Henry Adolphus,—they're the finest I ever partook of."

Dorothy's heart grew a little lighter after this. Gervoise Catheron might come at any moment. She tried not to listen to stray footsteps in the

street; she did her best to answer all the eager questions with which her host and hostess assailed her, and to give a faithful account of all that had happened since the outrage in Scarsdale Wood.

Mr. and Mrs. Dobb were ravenous for information upon this soul-absorbing topic; and Dorothy had to go over the same ground several times before they were appeased. Had she seen the gentleman before he left the Abbey? and how had he looked? and what had he said? and was there any thing particular about his ways? and so on. The Dobbs evidently considered that a gentleman who was about to be murdered ought to make a point of differing in some respect from commonplace people who are in no immediate danger of losing their lives.

Mr. Dobb had rarely enjoyed himself more thoroughly than he did this evening. Of course he had his own theories about the attack on Arthur Holroyde—theories which he expounded at large for the benefit of his wife and her cousin. His ideas on the subject were very profound; and his exposition of them was somewhat obscure. He

told his companions how he should act if he were the detective, and threw quite a new light upon the machinery of secret police, so elaborate was the scheme of detection which he set forth; and then he told them what he should say if he were counsel for the unknown assassin; and how he should charge the jury if he were the judge before whom the trial took place. He made himself crimson in the face as he delivered his speech for the defence; and made Selina's flimsy plated candlesticks quite leap as he slapped the table at the end of his energetic periods. It was only when the trial was over, and the judge had put on the black cap and had pronounced sentence on the unknown assassin, that Dorothy put her hand into her pocket and discovered a folded paper, whose contents, she thought, might possibly prove interesting to her companions.

'I quite forgot that I had it in my pocket," she said, as she unfolded the broad black-and-white poster. "It's a bill offering a reward for the apprehension of the murderer. There are hundreds of them printed; and they are to be

posted up in every part of the country, and in London too, I believe."

"Why, Dorothy," cried the clerk, with something like indignation in his tone; "what a little fool you were not to show us this before!"

He spread the bill upon the table, and read its contents aloud with intense gusto. But he paused and grew suddenly thoughtful as he read the numbers of the missing notes. He had a ready memory for figures, and one of those numbers seemed strangely familiar to him.

"69669!" he repeated: "I've a sort of recollection of writing some such number as that a day or two ago; for I remember thinking it was all loops and tails."

He paused for a few moments, scratching his head with a puzzled expression of face, and staring at the bill that lay spread out upon the table before him. Then he made a sudden pounce at his pocket, and produced a little memorandum-book. He turned the leaves with a rapid hand, and looked at the last entry.

"Good God!" he cried, starting to his feet,

"one of the notes is the very one that Gervoise Catheron paid me yesterday morning."

Dorothy sprang to her feet too, white and trembling.

"Oh, how can you say that!" she cried. "You cannot think that Gervoise was the man who shot Mr. Holroyde!"

She stood looking at him for a moment, and then exclaimed with a little half-hysterical laugh:

"How silly I am!—as if Gervoise would hurt any one for all the money in the world. The wicked wretch who robbed Mr. Holroyde must have palmed the note off upon Gervoise. It won't bring him into any danger, will it? Oh, Henry Adolphus, tell me that it can't bring him into any danger!"

"I don't know about that," answered Mr. Dobb moodily. "When there's been highway robbery and murder, and an innocent man disposes of a portion of the property within something like twelve hours after the event, the innocent man is rather liable to find himself in a jolly disagreeable fix. I don't know how it may be for

Catheron; but I know it's likely to be uncommon awkward for me."

And on this it was Selina's turn to be alarmed. That lady made a rush at her husband and embraced him hysterically, asking if it was to come to this, that a respectable young married man was to be accused of murder; and "oh, didn't I warn you harm would come of being intimate with Gervoise Catheron?" and "oh, Henry Adolphus, they never, never, never shall tear you to the scaffold;" and uttering a great many lamentations of the same character, which would have been extremely appropriate if the myrmidons of the law had been at that moment waiting to carry out the final arrangements for Mr. Dobb's execution.

The clerk extricated himself with some difficulty from the encircling arms of his wife.

"Don't be a fool, 'Lina," he exclaimed, "and don't begin bellowing till we know whether there's any thing to bellow about. I daresay it will all come right enough in the end. Of course Catheron must know where he got the money, and who gave it to him; and I daresay he'll be able to

put the detectives on the right scent, and perhaps get the reward for his pains," added Mr. Dobb, rather enviously. "Some fellows are always dropping into luck; and the more idle and good-for-nothing they are, and the less they do to deserve it, the more they drop into it."

Mr. Catheron's career during his residence at Castleford had not been distinguished by any particular success; but for the moment the clerk felt as if his friend had been one of Fortune's most favoured children.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mr. Dobb; "I'll just run round to the barracks and see if I can get hold of Catheron. I may be able to put him up to a good thing. Stop where you are till I come back, Doll. I daresay I shall bring Gervoise with me, and we'll both walk home with you."

Dorothy consulted her neat little silver watch. Social tea-drinkings at Amanda Villas took place at a very early hour, and though the evening had seemed quite a long one, it was now only half-past eight.

"Come back as soon as you can, please, Henry

Adolphus," said Dorothy; "I mustn't stay here after nine."

But she did stay after nine, for nine o'clock struck while Mr. Dobb was still absent. Poor Dorothy sat in silent agony awaiting his return, though she kept arguing with herself that there could be no cause for terror or anguish. Surely no harm could come of Gervoise Catheron's accidental possession of one of those missing notes. She knew nothing of the law of evidence; she had never studied the science of crime, or troubled herself to think about the details of those dreadful deeds which had been done within her memory, and whose dark records she had listened to, pale and shuddering, when the chief butler deigned to read aloud from the London papers in Mrs. Browning's room. She had no notion of the extent of the danger to which her lover was exposed; but she was stricken with fear and anguish nevertheless. It seemed so dreadful that the man she loved should be in any way involved in this dark mystery of crime and horror. So she sat pale and miserable, waiting for the clerk's return, and

deriving very little consolation from Mrs. Dobb, whose discourse ran chiefly upon her own feelings, and the prophetic terror with which she had been inspired with regard to Gervoise Catheron, and the numerous warnings she had given her husband upon the subject of his friendship with the lieutenant, and the foreshadowings of the present state of affairs, which had been revealed to her in her dreams.

"I dreamt of riding in a third-class carriage only the night before last," said Selina, "and I think you'll allow that looked like coming down in the world; and Dobb was sitting opposite to me eating green apples. I never did like dreaming of unripe fruit; it signifies failure in your plans, you know, and you'll find it explained in that way in Napoleon Bonaparte's own Dream-book. And then the carriage came to a dead-stop all at once, and we were told to get out; and it wasn't a carriage after all, but a steamer going on dry land, and the paddle-wheels had stuck in the ground, which of course I understand to signify that you are sure to come to harm when you choose ac-

quaintance in a higher station to your own and get out of your element, as it were— But I see you're not listening, Dorothy; so I'll say no more."

"Oh, yes, Selina, I am listening. But you frighten me so when you talk of those bad dreams. I shall die if any harm comes to Gervoise."

"It's like your selfishness to think of nothing but your Gervoises. But I feel myself bound to tell you that I'm afraid there's trouble in store for you, Dorothy. I dreamt last week that I saw you dressed in pink; and I never yet knew any good to come of dreaming of a pink dress."

While Mrs. Dobb was thus feeding the vague fear that oppressed poor Dorothy, the clerk's latch-key sounded in the street-door, and in another moment Henry Adolphus entered the little sitting-room. He was paler than Dorothy, and the humorous faculty seemed to have deserted him for the time being.

"Here's a pretty black look-out for us all!" he said; "Catheron has bolted—hasn't shown himself at the barracks since Thursday night; and his commanding-officer came out, as I was making

my inquiries, and has been hauling me over the coals to any extent; and accusing me of being concerned in Catheron's going to the bad: low company, and twopenny-halfpenny betting, and pot-houses, and all that sort of thing, has been pelted at my head for the last half-hour. 'If it wasn't for such as you,' said the swell, 'there wouldn't be so many junior officers a disgrace to their corps. I have reported Mr. Catheron's disappearance to the Admiralty,' he said, 'and if he comes back, there'll be a court-martial held for the investigation of his conduct;' and then he called to one of the men: 'See this person out at the gates,' he said; 'and don't let me hear of him hanging about here again;' and upon that he turned upon his heel and walked off. Oh, shouldn't I have liked to have presented him with a testimonial in the shape of a small piece of my mind?"

Mr. Dobb might have said more in his indignation; but at this juncture his attention was called to Dorothy, who had fainted "dead off," as Selina said.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISMAL SABBATH.

To Marcia those silent days were very terrible in which the house was hushed, and every sound of human footstep and human voice suppressed, in order that the fitful slumbers of Arthur Holroyde should at least be unbroken by any external cause. During those dreadful days the daughter of the house sat alone in her room; sat for hours motionless and silent—in seeming almost apathetic, but in reality possessed by a terror so profound that it deprived her of all power of action.

She had been told that there was no hope for Arthur Holroyde. He might linger so many hours, so many days even, but it was only a question as to the endurance of his pain. Lingering or slow as the footsteps of Death might be, they were approaching him none the less surely. The

utmost that medical science could do for Arthur Holroyde was to slacken the pace of those fatal footsteps. Marcia Denison knew this; and she fully believed that the dying man had been stricken by the hand of Godfrey Pierrepoint.

Had he not said that if they two met, there would be a ruder justice than any to be obtained in courts of law—a hastier settlement of a dishonoured husband's wrongs than could be effected by the prosings of proctors or the decree of any mortal parliament? And a fatal accident had brought about their meeting; and this was what had come of it. She had thought much of the possibility of such an encounter, after her interview with Godfrey; but even amidst the vague terror that tormented her, there had been the hope—nay more than the hope—the belief that Christian feeling would restrain his hand, that he would let his enemy go—half in mercy, half in scorn—as he might release some hunted beast that was scarcely worthy to become an honest hunter's prey.

Her fears for Godfrey Pierrepoint locked her

lips. She had made no inquiry as to the mode and manner of the attack upon Arthur Holroyde. If she had known that he had been shot in the back, she might have been spared the anguish of these terrible days; for under no circumstances could she have believed Godfrey Pierrepoint an assassin. She fancied that the men had met each other face to face; and there on the spot, without time for consideration or ceremonial observance, some rude duel had taken place between them, and the guilty man had fallen by the hand of the avenger. She thought this, and the horror of the thought froze her very soul. She dared not ask any question about the tragic mystery. However cautiously she might speak, some unlucky word might be dangerous, perhaps fatal, to him.

"I am groping in darkness," she thought; "I will not speak of this thing at all. I will not open my lips upon this subject, for fear I should do mischief."

And Dorothy, seeing her mistress so pale and silent, so cold and reserved, could not take heart to speak of the tragedy. She had told Miss

Denison of the great surgeon's sentence of death, the particulars of which had penetrated to the housekeeper's room; but this was all she had dared to say. Sir Jasper kept his apartments, and Mrs. Harding also remained in her own room, quite prostrated by the shock, she told Mrs. Browning, when the housekeeper visited her in her darkened chamber. It may seem an easy thing to kill a mandarin when a wish only is sufficient to do the deed, and there is all the distance between Europe and Asia to divide the victim from his murderer. But what if the evil wish has been father to the deed, and the mandarin attacked by a blundering hand has been brought home to die by inches under the very roof that shelters his murderer? *That* contingency can scarcely be very agreeable. Mrs. Harding groaned aloud as she rejected some sloppy invalid nourishment which the housekeeper had carried her.

"No, you dear good creature," she exclaimed, —for there were few circumstances under which she forgot to be civil,—"I don't want any arrow-root. This dreadful event has brought on my

neuralgia; and arrowroot is no use in neuralgia. Do go away—that's a dear kind soul. I *know* you're wanted downstairs." And then when the chamber-door had closed upon the dear good soul, Blanche Harding flung off the bed-clothes and rose, tall and ghost-like, and terrible to look upon in her white garments. She rose and paced the room with her bare feet—a modern Jane Shore, and with more than Jane Shore's sins upon her soul.

"O God," she cried, "what a wretch I am! Was there ever such a wicked creature as I? How many years am I to endure my dreadful life; and how shall I dare to die when my time comes?"

The house was like a tomb during these dismal days of waiting on the fatal footsteps. The servants glided to and fro like the ghosts in Hades. The tongue of the dinner-bell was dumb; no regular meals of any description were served in the upper regions; but trays were carried upstairs, and carried down again with their contents very often untasted. Who could eat or drink while

those stealthy footsteps were advancing through the silence?

It might have been long before Marcia Denison aroused herself from the deadly stupor which had oppressed her since the night of the murder, if there had not arisen a sudden need for her womanly care and tenderness. On the Sunday after the fatal night Dorothy fell ill, very ill, alarmingly ill; and Marcia's heart melted all at once when she found her little *protégée* tossing her feverish head on a tumbled pillow, and uttering wild incoherent talk. The family doctor came to look at the sick girl, and prescribed some simple effervescing draught.

"Mental excitement, no doubt," he said; "and perhaps a sudden chill into the bargain. Girls of this age are so reckless. Don't be alarmed, Miss Denison, we shall bring your little maid round; depend upon it."

Marcia dismissed the housemaid who had been the first to discover Dorothy's illness, and had been administering weak tea and strong smelling-salts, under the belief that those two restoratives were

infallible in all mortal illness. The girl was kind-hearted, but rough and clumsy: so Marcia dismissed her and took up her post at Dorothy's bedside, with a New Testament open on the little table near her, and a weary, weary heart.

"Oh, let me do some good in this world," she thought; "I can do nothing for *him*. He is surrounded by dangers, and I cannot stretch out my hand to help him."

It was a weary, weary Sunday. The bells of Scarsdale Church seemed to be ringing all day; and indeed this is an attribute of church-bells in general if you do not go to church. In Marcia's sad fancy they sounded like funeral bells.

"Where has he gone?" she thought; "what has he done since that night?"

She had not dared to ask if Godfrey Pierrepoint were at the Hermitage. To betray that he had been in the neighbourhood might be to betray him to trial and doom. Lynch-law in England is apt to be called murder; and the days are long gone by in which any irregular midnight-duel would be pronounced justifiable homicide. So

she dared not utter the name by which Godfrey Pierrepoint was known at Scarsdale. She dared not wander out into the wood in the hope of encountering him; lest the sight of her should lure him from some hiding-place and entrap him in some unknown danger.

She could only wonder about him. Was he lying somewhere in the wood, hidden deep in a forest of fern waiting a safe hour for his flight? or had he left the place boldly, showing himself in the face of men, and starting anew on his wild journeyings across the earth? It would be more consistent with his character to do this: and Marcia shuddered as she thought how easily he might be found and brought back—brought back to disgrace and death.

It was dusk, and for the first time in many hours Marcia had fallen into a doze—a slumber almost as feverish as that of the girl she was tending. Confused dreams full of vague terror disturbed her as she slept: but through them all she was conscious that they were only dreams, and conscious also of the melancholy sick-chamber and

Dorothy's feverish moanings, as she tossed her tumbled hair from side to side upon her pillow.

"Don't! don't!" cried the girl; "don't say that! It wasn't him—it couldn't be him!"

She had been very incoherent in her little intervals of delirium, and had talked of so many things, and had said the same things so often, that poor Marcia's brain had grown bewildered by the senseless repetition. But now in her semi-somnolent state she found herself listening to the girl's wild talk.

"The notes!" cried Dorothy; "no, no, no!—not the same note—not the same number—not the same—"

The door was opened while the girl lay with her hands clasped entreatingly, reiterating incoherent sentences—in which the words 'notes' and 'numbers' occurred repeatedly. Mrs. Browning entered with a cup of tea and some ethereal bread-and-butter on a small silver tray.

"I've brought you a cup of nice strong tea, miss," said the old woman; "do please try to eat a few mouthfuls of bread-and-butter with it

—you've had nothing since breakfast, Miss Marcia." The old servants at Scarsdale rarely called their young mistress 'Miss Denison.' "And such a breakfast! I saw the tray that Sanders brought downstairs, and the things on it had been scarcely touched. Dear Miss Marcia, you'll make yourself ill."

"I don't think it will much matter if I am ill," Marcia answered wearily. "I can't eat, Browning. Well, I'll take some tea and bread-and-butter to please you. I'm afraid Dorothy is very ill; she has been delirious again since I last gave her her medicine."

The sick girl was still talking in the same dreary moaning voice. The housekeeper, who was omnipotent in the Abbey in the time of sickness or death, went to the bedside and bent over the restless little figure.

"How she does go on about notes and numbers!" said Mrs. Browning; "I do think she's worrying her poor head with the thoughts of that bill that the police-officer from London has had printed."

"What bill?"

"The bill offering a reward for the apprehension of the murderer."

"Who—who has offered the reward?"

"Your papa, Miss Marcia. He has acted like a noble gentleman as he is. Mr. Holroyde was his visitor, he said, and was not to be assassinated with im— I think it's punity, isn't it, miss? but those long words do bother me sometimes. The police-officer told me all about it."

"I should like to see one of those bills, Browning," said Marcia in a faint voice. A reward offered, and by her father! The sleuth-hounds of the law had their hungry teeth sharpened by the promise of gold.

"I'll get you one of the placards, if you like, Miss Marcia," said the housekeeper; "there are plenty of them in my room."

The dame went out into the corridor, where she found an active young housemaid, whom she despatched in quest of what she wanted. It would have taken Mrs. Browning herself a long time to journey to and fro the lower regions,

but the active young housemaid made light of passages and stairs, and tripped back very speedily with the placard in her hand. The housekeeper carried it to Marcia, and then for the first time Marcia discovered that Arthur Holroyde had been robbed of 300*l.*

That discovery was the most overpowering joy she had ever known in her life. To her the fact of the robbery seemed conclusive evidence of Godfrey Pierrepoint's innocence. A meaner-minded woman might have suspected that the robbery was a blind—a mere device intended to throw the police on the wrong scent. But Marcia had no such thought as this. Her fears had deeply wronged the man who loved her; but she had never wronged him so deeply as to think him capable of any crawling baseness. Whatever a noble savage might do unblushingly, she fancied it was just possible that Godfrey Pierrepoint might have done in a moment of ungovernable anger. But to rifle the senseless form of his victim, to defile his fingers by contact with his enemy's sordid money—no! such

a deed as that could never be done by any scion of a proud and honourable race.

When she had in some manner recovered from the overpowering emotion that came with the discovery of Godfrey's innocence, Marcia ventured for the first time to speak freely of the deed that had been done. She questioned Mrs. Browning, and heard the details of the crime. The victim had been shot in the back. Ah, thank Heaven! he would attack no enemy thus; face to face only could such as he encounter his foe. Marcia listened quietly to all the housekeeper had to tell her, and then sat brooding over the terrible story as the twilight grew more sombre, and the last reflection of the setting sun faded slowly on the western wall. And every now and then Dorothy's wild talk broke in upon her reverie, and the girl's chief cry was still about numbers and notes.

All at once she started up in bed and cried aloud—

"Oh! no, no, no, Selina! don't be cruel—don't say he did it!"

Marcia sprang to her feet.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "this girl knows something about the murder."

She was petrified with astonishment. Could the wretch who had committed the crime be any one of Dorothy's kindred—men who were renowned for their long service and rugged honesty? The girl's illness, which the doctor said was caused by excitement of the mind rather than disorder of the body; her wild talk about the contents of the placard; and then that cry of anguish—"Don't say he did it!"—all pointed to one conclusion.

"What am I to do?" thought Marcia. "I cannot betray this girl's unconscious utterances; that would be too cruel, too hard. But if *he* should be suspected, if *he* should be in danger; or if any innocent man should be suspected? What am I to do? O God, restore this girl to reason, and if she knows the secret of the crime, unseal her lips, for the sake of the innocent!"

Marcia fell upon her knees by her maid's sick-bed, and prayed. There are crises in the

life of a woman in which only prayer can save her from despair or madness. The supernal calm which comes down upon the souls of faithful supplicants descended upon Marcia Denison's spirit as the night closed round the kneeling figure.

CHAPTER X.

A VERY NARROW ESCAPE.

THAT was by no means a pleasant Sunday which Mr. Dobb spent after the discovery of Gervoise Catheron's disappearance from Castleford. It seemed very clear that the bank-note which had replaced the abstracted money had been procured in some underhand and mysterious way. How darkly mysterious the mode in which it had been obtained, Henry Adolphus dared not contemplate, even in his most secret thoughts. The most pressing question just now was how far he himself could be affected by the fact that one of the missing notes had passed through his hands.

"I think horse-racing must have been invented by the devil," thought the unfortunate Dobb; "or it would never get a man into such a

scrape as I'm in. What a happy dog I was before I met Catheron, or knew any thing about his Farringdon-Street betting!"

And then he reflected upon his friend's disappearance.

"Catheron was up to his very eyebrows in debt," he thought; "and I daresay he found the place too hot to hold him at last, and made up his mind to cut it. He was always talking of the likelihood of his getting kicked out of his regiment or being obliged to make a bolt of it sooner or later. But if this man at the Abbey dies, and they don't find the real murderer, it will be uncommon unlucky for the lieutenant that he should have made his bolt the very day after the murder."

The more he considered this unfortunate coincidence, the more darkly strange it appeared to the mind of Mr. Dobb.

"How did Catheron come by that bank-note?" he thought. "It wasn't much over twelve hours after the murder when I found the money on my desk. How did he come by it? Good God! it

makes my brain turn giddy as I think of it! Only twelve hours!"

Of all things most difficult to believe or to realise must surely be the idea that a person you have known intimately—your own familiar friend—has been guilty of a dark and hideous deed. It is so natural to suppose that murderers are a race apart, bearing the brand of Cain upon their brow before as well as after the commission of their dreadful sin. But Cain was like other men before he lifted the club to slay his innocent brother. People who knew Mr. William Palmer of Rugeley declare that he was a most agreeable gentleman—the man of all others of whom a needy acquaintance would have sought to borrow a five-pound note; and men who went to school with Dr. Pritchard of Glasgow are fain to confess that he was like other boys, and played fly-the-garter and rounders as merrily as his companions. There is some turning-point of existence, perhaps, in which Satan lies in wait for his chosen victim; and until that point is reached the foredoomed traveller jogs along the road of life very much like other travellers.

All through that interminable Sunday Mr. Dobb revolved the same questions in his mind. How had Gervoise Catheron come by that fatal fifty-pound note? and how was he, Henry Adolphus, to account for the possession of it?

He could only do so by telling the truth about the abstracted money that had been hazarded on the fortunes of Twopenny-Postman, and to do that would surely be ruin; for was Sloper, the man of iron, a likely person to forgive any act of dishonesty in his confidential clerk—a clerk who had to be trusted with the collection of precious sovereigns and shillings, and even bank-notes?

"I've a good mind to follow Catheron's example, and cut it," thought Mr. Dobb; but a judicious perusal of the Sunday papers had shown him that the clerks who run away by one train are generally brought back ignominiously by the next; and that to escape from any English port in the present day seems about as impossible as it was to escape from the Tower in the Middle Ages.

"I must face it out," thought Mr. Dobb. "Lord knows what will become of me!"

He dared not go to the barracks to inquire about Gervoise Catheron, for he had been too cruelly put to shame by the treatment of that gentleman's commanding officer. But he went to the tobacconist's, where there were military men lounging and smoking, and remarking to one another that it was a doosid bore a fellah couldn't play billiards on a Sunday; and where he heard animated discussions about the outrage in Scarsdale Wood, and the lieutenant's desertion of his regiment. Nobody, however, thought of connecting the two events together.

In the evening Mr. Dobb had his reunion. He had enjoined Selina to utter no word relating to the bank-note that had been in his possession; and had, indeed, done his best to stifle that lady's fears by telling her that he had in all probability made some mistake as to the number of the note. Having done this, he felt a little easier in his mind, and at dusk was prepared to receive his friends with some show of his customary gaiety. But the evening seemed long and dreary to him; and Spinner's song of "The Admiral" a shade

more dismal than usual. Of course the attack upon Mr. Holroyde was freely discussed in this genial assembly, and all those ingenious theories which people delight in were duly expounded by different members of the company. The little assembly were terribly startled when, late in the evening, Mr. Dobb bounced suddenly out of his chair, and thumped his fist upon the table, crying,

"Oh, d—n! we've had quite enough of this! If you can't talk of any thing but raw heads and bloody bones, you'd better shut up and go home."

The guests looked at one another aghast. Dobb was accustomed to be playful, and they were accustomed to submit to his playfulness, even when it took the form of dry peas aimed at them from a pea-shooter; but this was rude. Spinner helped himself to a glass of beer. When a man visits on the Yorkshire system he is obliged to protect his own interests.

"Bye, bye, Dobb!" said Mr. Spinner, when he had drunk his beer; "and I hope the next time I have the pleasure of enjoying your society, I may find it rather more agreeable." And for

once in his life the brilliant brewer's-clerk could find no words in which to retort upon his friend.

The fountain of Mr. Dobb's wit was frozen. Monday morning was so terribly near at hand now; and his mental vision was absorbed by the image of Sloper, stern and questioning, as he would have to encounter it when he made his appearance at the office. He was too good a man of business not to know that the local bank would be one of the first places in which the detective would seek for the missing notes, and that the fatal fifty would be immediately traced to his hands.

It need scarcely be said that the buttered penny-roll, which marked Mr. Dobb's Monday as with a white stone—for in the dismal monotony of the week's breakfasts at Amanda Villas a hot roll was quite an event—was pushed aside untasted by the wretched clerk. He tried to conceal his apprehension beneath a ghastly aspect of gaiety. He stuck his hat a little more aside upon his head than usual, and a man of the Dobb species *never* can wear his hat like a civilised being. He

hummed a negro melody of an excruciatingly lively character as he walked to Sloper and Halliday's establishment; and he twirled a little cane which he carried with an air expressive of intense gaiety of heart. But these heroic efforts were all in vain; for an acquaintance who met him on his way told him that he was looking by no means "up to time;" and the little looking-glass hanging in a corner of the office—the glass before which he had perfected himself in the facial graces of "Tippettywitchet" and "Hot Codlins"—showed him a pallid countenance and wan faded eyes, that looked as if they had been simmered in warm water. He had not long to wait for his doom. He had seen a man hanging about the outside of the establishment, and had felt his blood turn to ice as the thought flashed upon him that the man might be a police-officer in plain clothes. But this suspicious-looking man had allowed him to pass by unmolested.

He hung up his hat; and again the foul fiend took the opportunity of reminding him what a convenient peg that would be to hang himself

upon. He placed himself before his desk and made an elaborate pretence of beginning work, but felt himself no more able to attend to the accounts of Sloper and Halliday than he was able to square the circle, or to surpass the late Professor Porson in the composition of Greek Iambics.

"It's no use," he thought, with a groan; "I don't know whether the figures are upside down, but I do know that they look as if they were."

He made no further effort to employ himself, but sat with his head supported by his hands, a statue of despair. The junior clerk, Mr. Sparkins, looked askance at his superior. He knew that great man was in trouble, and he was not particularly sorry for his affliction. The mind of seven-and-twenty is apt to entertain despotic views with regard to underlings of seventeen, and Mr. Dobb had given his junior reason to know who was the master in that office. There had been no spoken hint of the clerk's disgrace, but unpleasant things have a subtle power of making themselves known. The voice of Mr. Sloper had been heard that morning calling for Mr. Dobb, and the tone in

which he pronounced that name had been calculated to inspire terror in the boldest heart.

"Ain't you a trifle late this morning, Mr. Dobb?" remarked the young Sparkins; "the governor has been calling you ever so many times."

The office in which Mr. Sloper administered the affairs of the firm was a pleasant room situated on the other side of a courtyard which had once been a garden, but which was now devoted to the stowage of empty casks. The window of the principal's office was opposite the window of his clerk's office; and when his employer was at home, Mr. Dobb, busy at his desk, had the satisfaction of knowing that the eyes of that employer were on him, taking note of his industry, or keeping a sharp account of his idleness, as the case might be.

To-day the unhappy clerk was acutely conscious of that terrible presence in the office on the other side of the yard; nor was he long allowed to abandon himself to the apathy of despair. A stentorian voice roared "Dobb!" and then there

appeared at the window of the principal's office a rubicund visage, to which the signs of good living had imparted no jolly bacchanalian aspect, but rather a dark lurid crimson, such as might have dyed the countenance of a malignant satyr.

Mr. Dobb descended from his stool, and went to his doom. He found his employer seated in confabulation with a grave-looking stranger, while young Halliday lounged with his back against the chimneypiece and his hands in his pockets. A copy of the placard which the clerk had seen posted on the dead walls and hoardings of Castleford lay open on the table before Mr. Sloper.

"Dobb," said that gentleman sternly, "a fifty-pound note, number 69669, was paid into the bank on Friday afternoon amongst the moneys which Mr. Halliday received from you on that day. That note was never paid to you in the affairs of this house. How did it come into your hands?"

There was nothing for the brewer's-clerk but to tell the truth. He turned very red, and then very pale, and stood for some moments twisting

the buttons of his waistcoat round and round in his hot nervous fingers. Then he told his story —he confessed every thing; the money abstracted from the iron-safe to be wagered on the fortunes of Twopenny-Postman; the promises which the lieutenant had made as to the liquidation of his friend's advance; the envelope containing the bank-note which the clerk had found on his desk early on Friday morning. Of course he told his story badly—stammering and contradicting himself, and trying back, and nearly breaking down more than once in the narration; of course he insisted on backing-up his assertions with all manner of unnecessary details, and was more particular as to the accuracy of those details than the accuracy of the leading points of his story.

"We don't want to know about your picnic, or what this Mr. Catheron said about horse-racing," cried the angry Sloper, striking his heavy hand upon the blotting-pad before him; "we want to know how you came to embezzle money intrusted to you—intrusted to you by people who

placed confidence in you, sir, which they will never do again?"

The respectable-looking stranger here interposed, and suggested that perhaps Mr. Dobb had some letter from Mr. Catheron, received with the fifty-pound note.

But the clerk replied that there had not been so much as a line from the lieutenant.

"And that certainly looked a trifle piscatorial. Not that Catheron ever was much of a scribe," said Mr. Dobb, who was beginning to recover himself a little by this time. It seemed as if the worst horror of his doom was over now that he had faced the terrific Sloper.

"Perhaps you have the envelope in which the bank-note was sent you?" said the respectable-looking stranger.

The costume of the Dobb tribe is provided with more pockets than any other style of dress. Henry Adolphus turned out the linings of seven or eight of these receptacles before it was quite clear to him that the envelope addressed by Gervoise Catheron was lost.

"This is the coat I had on, and this is the waistcoat," he said; "it's like my luck to lose that envelope."

"Pray don't give us any of your slang here, sir," returned the angry Sloper. "A clerk who embezzles his employer's money in order to indulge in the degrading vice of betting on the turf can scarcely expect much *luck*, I should think. I'll tell you what it is, Mr Dobb: this is a very black business. Here is a gentleman robbed and murdered—yes, sir, murdered; for I hear there is no hope of this Mr. Holroyde's life being spared—a gentleman robbed and murdered, sir, on Thursday night; and on Friday morning you deliver one of the notes abstracted from that gentleman to my partner Mr. Halliday. As for the story that you have just told us, sir, I take upon myself to say that there is not one word of truth in it from beginning to end; and I ask you once more how that money came into your possession?"

But at this point the stranger interposed for the third time.

"I think that question had better be discussed

elsewhere," he said. "Whatever Mr. Dobb says here may be used against him; and I must therefore beg him not to commit himself by any statement which he may hereafter wish to withdraw."

Henry Adolphus stared at the stranger in utter amazement.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed indignantly. "I've been telling you the truth, and I don't mean to eat my words, here or any where else. If Mr. Sloper chooses to proceed against me for having tampered with his money, why—why he must do so, and I can't help it; and it serves me right for having been fool enough to back that horse. But I think it ought to be remembered that it's the first time I ever touched a sixpence belonging to the firm, and that I've been a faithful servant—yes, and a precious hard-working servant too—for upwards of seven years."

"I am afraid this is a blacker business than embezzlement, Mr. Dobb," began the stern Sloper; but the stranger laid his hand upon that gentleman's arm with an authoritative gesture:

"Come, come, this will not do," he whispered;

and thereupon Mr. Halliday, who had been shuffling about during the whole of this conversation, now standing on one foot, now on the other, after the restless manner of a young gentleman who doesn't know what to do with himself, burst out indignantly:

"Oh come, I say, Sloper, and you too, Mr.—Mr.—whatever your name is, Dobb's not the sort of fellow to be mixed up in the kind of business you're talking about. We've known him ever since he was a lad, you know, and we've always found him a very good fellow, and just the last man in the world to shoot another fellow through the back for the sake of three hundred pounds."

"What!" cried Mr. Dobb; "does any one suspect *me* of having done that?"

The respectable-looking stranger, who was no other than the London detective who had been summoned to Scarsdale, stepped forward and produced a pair of handcuffs from his coat-pocket.

"I am sorry to say that I have considered myself justified in procuring a warrant for your apprehension," he said; "but don't be down-

hearted; if you've told us nothing but the truth about your friend Catheron, I think I shall be able to see you through this. Perhaps, however, you may be able to prove an *alibi*."

"What time was the murder committed?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"Between nine and twelve o'clock."

"Then I rather *can* prove an *alibi*," cried the indignant clerk, "if our slavy doesn't make a fool of herself. My wife and I had a few words on Thursday morning, and made it up over an early supper on Thursday evening; and it was half-past eight when the pot-boy from the Coach and Horses brought the supper-beer. I opened the door to him; and I didn't put my nose outside Amanda Villas after that."

"And if you can't prove an *alibi*, Dobb, and they'll take bail for you, I'm ready to be one of your securities," said Mr. Halliday.

A fly was sent for. The handcuffs were dispensed with as an unnecessary degradation, inasmuch as Mr. Dobb was quite willing to appear before any tribunal whatever; and the metro-

politan detective managed every thing with such perfect discretion, that the clerk's removal to the house of the Roxborough magistrate was effected without *esclandre*. That important functionary had elected to hold a preliminary investigation at twelve o'clock that day, and the Scarsdale witnesses had been duly summoned. A solicitor, who had been a member of the Dobb circle, and one of the wildest roisterers of Roxborough some three or four years before, was sent for at the clerk's request, to watch the proceedings on his behalf; and the maid-of-all-work, on whose evidence the *alibi* chiefly depended, was also summoned, and did her best to put her employer's neck in jeopardy by her persistent refusal to give straightforward answers, or to confine her speech to the subject in hand.

But in spite of this young lady, the evidence of the clerk's innocence of any overt share in the outrage was very plain, and Henry Adolphus departed from the magistrate's presence a free man, to find his wife in her strongest hysterics in the magistrate's-hall. And before Mr. Dobb had

quitted the magisterial residence, the metropolitan detective had ascertained the exact train by which Gervoise Catheron had left Roxborough, and was speeding London-wards in hot chase of the wretched lieutenant.

CHAPTER XI.

"RING OUT YOUR BELLS; LET MOURNING SHOWS BE SPREAD."

Mr. Holroyde was dying. There was no longer the faintest ray of hope. The great surgeon—who flitted to and fro between London and Roxborough as if he had been some ominous bird-of-passage—and Sir Jasper's medical attendant were agreed upon this point. On the very day in which the preliminary investigation was held by the magistrate, the London surgeon announced to Sir Jasper that his patient was sinking, and that any worldly affairs which Arthur Holroyde might have to arrange had better be arranged with all despatch.

"Is he still conscious?" asked Sir Jasper, who had only been permitted to see his guest once during the silent struggle between life and death.

"Yes. He is quite conscious. Your clergy-

man, who seems a most worthy person, though perhaps a little deficient in tact, has been with him several times; but I fear Mr. Holroyde is not a religious man. However, he received the clergyman with perfect courtesy, and did not seem averse to his presence. I asked him if he would like his lawyer to be sent for; but he said no—there were plenty of lawyers who would like to see him, but none whom he wanted to see. And then he asked me if I remembered Lemaitre or Wallack as Don Cæsar de Bazan, and reminded me of that speech in which the doomed count predicts the lamentations of his creditors. A very singular man this Mr. Holroyde."

"A *persifleur*," said the Baronet. "I daresay he has lived a very pleasant life; and now he is dying, alone—in my library, with all those grim pagan books surrounding him, and those stony pagan busts keeping guard over him—and, with the exception of Deverill Slingsby, who has ridden over two or three times to make inquiries, nobody seems to care very much whether he lives or dies."

Sir Jasper pondered upon this more gravely

than he had been wont to consider any thing within the few last years of his existence. The shadow of death in his house reminded him very painfully of that fell darkness which had come down on his life when his favourite daughter had been brought home from her fatal ride. So vividly indeed was that sad time recalled to him, that he by no means regretted the absence of the widow, who still kept her room—and was still suffering, she told Mrs. Browning, from that terrible nervous prostration which had been produced by the shock her too sensitive mind had undergone. This was what she said, or implied, in her discourse with the simple-minded housekeeper.

"The lively widow is an *article de luxe*," thought Sir Jasper; "and there are times when a man's taste leans rather to sackcloth and ashes than to the Sybarite's rose-leaves or the lotus-eater's voluptuous repose. What a strange thing life is—and death too! How wonderful the two great enigmas which the universal sphinx propounds to the universal Œdipus, and which Œdipus has never yet been able to answer to

his own satisfaction! This man who is dying had something of my own philosophy; and yet, now that he *is* dying, I pity him much more than I should pity that stammering curate of Marcia's if he were on his deathbed. I wonder whether Diderot and Voltaire were sorry for each other."

It was growing dusk on that autumn afternoon when Sir Jasper was summoned to the bedside of his sinking guest, at the request of Arthur Holroyde himself. The dying man was very feeble, but he was possessed of all his senses, and was quite calm. He begged to be left alone with his host.

"The doctors let me know some days since that there was very little hope for me," he said, as Sir Jasper seated himself by the bedside; "but I have no very profound faith in the acumen of the medical profession, and I waited to see whether they had told me the truth. I know now that they were right. I have a very short time to live, Sir Jasper. First let me remember my duty as a gentleman. I thank you—as heartily as a dying

man can thank any body—for the hospitality you have given me. I might have died in a sponging-house, like Morland; or in a hospital, like many a better man than Morland; or like a dog in a ditch. It is much pleasanter to die in Scarsdale Abbey."

"I wish you could have lived in Scarsdale Abbey," said the Baronet kindly. "Until to-day I have hoped that I might see you ride away from this place as gaily as you rode that fatal night when you stopped at the curve of the avenue to wave us an adieu."

"Yes, I was a light-hearted dog enough when I did that; but when I ride away from Scarsdale next, I shall go feet foremost. The game of life has been pretty well played out for me, Sir Jasper; and perhaps I have some reason to be grateful to the unknown vagabond who snatched the cards out of my hand, and put an end to the play. I am old enough to remember Napoleon at St. Helena, and I once met Brummel at Caen. *That* is the way we brilliant fellows end our lives. But I have no breath to waste on philosophy. I have sent for you, Sir Jasper Denison, because I want

you to help me to make the only atonement I can make for one of the sins of my life. You have been a rich man, Sir Jasper, and I daresay yours has been an existence of honourable prosperity. If I were not too grateful to be bitter, I should be inclined to tell you that it is easy for a prosperous man to be honourable. Were I a preacher, I would preach the antithesis of the familiar precept. It is your poor man who finds it so difficult to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"Tell me how I can serve you, Mr. Holroyde, and I will give you the best service of my brain or my purse, whichever it may be you have need of," said Sir Jasper.

"If you knew me better, you would not offer me your purse," answered the sick man. "But I will be generous for once in my life. A week ago I should have been very glad to borrow your money: pile all the gold of California round my bed to-night, and these weak fingers will have no power to clutch one nugget of the precious ore. Sir Jasper, I have done many bitter deeds in my life—not such crimes as find their way into acts

of parliament or criminal codes. I have wronged women and children; the friends whose hands I have clasped, knowing that I meant to do them wrong; the creditors who have trusted me; the shallow young dupes who have thought it a fine thing to choose me for their model; for was I not the dangerous Arthur Holroyde, the incorrigible Arthur Holroyde, the wicked irresistible Arthur Holroyde—just the sort of man raw youth is ready to imitate and worship? Lying in this room, I have had plenty of time to consider my past life, and to discover that it has been a mistake. The game has been rather a brilliant game; but, oh, the cruel waste of candles that might have lighted better things! But I have no time for moralising. In all the record of my wrong-doing, there is only one deed which I can in some measure atone on this my deathbed. If my crimes were not tolerably notorious—if I had any hope of descending to my grave in the odour of sanctity, I might die with sealed lips, for what I have to tell is a story of baseness, which you, Sir Jasper, as a rich man, can afford to despise. But I am

the bad Arthur Holroyde, and any new revelation of my misdeeds will add little to my evil fame. When once a man enjoys so bad a reputation as mine has been, he may be hung half-a-dozen times and be none the worse for it. A person in this house told me of your acquaintance with a certain Mr. Pauncefort—an African traveller—an eccentric individual."

"Yes, I know him well."

"Do you know where to find him—to-day—now at once?"

"Unhappily, no. He left this place in July—I believe with the intention of going back to Africa."

"It has been suggested to me that he might possibly have remained in England, and that your daughter, Miss Denison, might be able to throw some light upon his whereabouts."

"My daughter!" cried Sir Jasper. "How should she know any thing about him?"

"Have you never had reason to suspect that between Mr. Pauncefort and Miss Denison there may have been something more than a common

friendship? Women are very keen observers of one another. A lady has hinted the existence of an attachment between your daughter and the tenant of the Hermitage.

"The widow, of course," thought the Baronet. "What sly creatures these women are! The widow wants to marry off my daughter in order that she may have the coast clear for carrying out her schemes upon me. And my daughter preserves a serene appearance of ladylike indifference to my friend, while he and she are making love to one another under my very nose. What a world! what a world!"

Sir Jasper had time to make these reflections while Arthur Holroyde lay with his eyes closed waiting for strength to proceed with what he had to say. He had spoken in a very low voice; but even that effort overcame him for the moment.

"Sir Jasper," he said, laying his hand on the Baronet's arm, "I want to see this man—Pauncefort—I want to see him. I have wronged him more deeply, more deliberately than I ever wronged any one else; and I can in some mea-

sure undo that wrong. If it is possible that your daughter may know where he is to be found, I earnestly entreat you to appeal to her."

"You shall appeal to her yourself," answered the Baronet. "She can refuse you nothing."

He rang a bell, which was answered by his own valet, who had helped to nurse Arthur Holroyde, and who was a most inestimable creature in sickness—a man whose movements were as the movements of a phantom.

"Let Miss Denison know that Mr. Holroyde wishes to see her, and that I wish her to come to Mr. Holroyde," said Sir Jasper.

The man bowed silently and departed. Five minutes afterwards Marcia was standing a few paces from the bed on which Arthur Holroyde lay. She had obeyed his summons without hesitation. The sublimity of death covered this man's wickedness as with a mantle, and there was no mercy he could have entreated of Marcia Denison which she would have refused to him.

"What hope could he have of a sinless Saviour's compassion, if we his sinful fellow-creatures denied

him our pity?" she thought, as she hurried to obey her father's desire.

"Miss Denison," said Arthur Holroyde, "I want to see the gentleman who has been known to you and your father as Mr. Pauncefort. If he is in England, and can be brought here in time to see me before I die, I may die easier, and he may live happier for the interview. He and I have been foes for more than fifteen years; but though he counts me as his worst enemy, he is ignorant of one wrong that I have done him — perhaps the worst wrong of all — a cold passionless bit of treachery that has put money in my purse at his expense—it may be at the cost of his happiness. If he is in England, Miss Denison, and if you have any clue to his whereabouts, for pity's sake do not withhold your knowledge from a man who will not be alive to profit by it to-morrow."

"Godfrey Pierrepoint is in England," answered Marcia.

"Ah, you know his name then! She was right," murmured Mr. Holroyde.

"He is in England. He was here, in the

grounds of this house, on Thursday evening. He may be at the Hermitage to-night."

"If he is here to-night, I shall say that Providence has brought us together. Do you know that Godfrey Pierrepoint hunted me over in America for two years—hunted me like a wild animal, and would have killed me, perhaps, if we had met, as remorselessly as a hunter slaughters his prey? But I escaped him. I doubled sometimes, and went back to the places I had left, and heard how he had been there inquiring about me. A kind of fatality seemed to protect me from him then. The same fatality brings me across his track now."

While Arthur Holroyde had been saying this, Sir Jasper had rung the bell; and again the inestimable valet answered his summons. A few words whispered to this person were enough; and in ten minutes the valet himself left the Abbey in search of the tenant of the Hermitage.

"Will you leave me now, Sir Jasper?" said Arthur Holroyde. "If there is any chance of my seeing Pierrepoint, I had better save my breath for the story that I shall have to tell him."

So Sir Jasper and his daughter left the sick-chamber, and Mrs. Browning and the family-doctor reigned in their stead. Marcia and her father went to the yellow drawing-room, which seemed gloomy of aspect to-night, in spite of the bright furniture and the glowing fire, reflected upon encaustic tiles of white and gold. The Baronet groaned aloud as he drew a reading-lamp towards him and unfolded his *Times*. Marcia made no pretence of occupation, but sat looking at the fire with sad dreamy eyes. She had no expectation of any good to be derived from a meeting between Godfrey Pierrepoint and the dying man, except such Christian forgiveness as a good man may accord his expiring enemy.

"I know he will be pitiful," she thought; "however long he may have brooded upon his wrongs, he will forget them in the presence of death."

She sat listening for the sound of Godfrey Pierrepoint's footstep on the terrace; but there was no sound except the wailing of the autumn wind. Sir Jasper's servant returned in an hour,

and came to the drawing-room to tell the result of his errand.

He had not found Mr. Pauncefort at the Hermitage. He had only found deaf Mrs. Tursgood, and had experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining any information from that lady. But he had ultimately ascertained that Sir Jasper's tenant had slept at the Hermitage for the last four nights, and had spent his days in wandering about the country, coming back long after dark, and letting himself in with a key when Mrs. Tursgood was locked in the slumbers of blameless old age.

"She doesn't seem to know whether Mr. Pauncefort is likely to come back to-night or not, sir," said the valet. "I should think, therefore, the best thing we could do, sir, would be to send a groom to the Hermitage, with orders to wait there for Mr. Pauncefort; and, if he comes back to-night, to bring him to the Abbey without loss of time. The old woman is deaf and stupid, you see, sir, and it would scarcely do to leave things to her."

"Quite right, Hills," answered Sir Jasper.

"Send the groom by all means. What a pity Paunèefort can't stay at home like a Christian!"

The evening seemed very long; the doctor and the nurse kept watch in the sick-chamber, where their patient lay very quiet, waiting with a strange serenity for the man he had wronged. In all the house that solemn Silence which seems a twin-sister of Death reigned supreme. In one of the upper chambers Dorothy lay in a slumber that was the best medicine for her fevered brain. In another chamber Blanche Harding paced to and fro with stealthy slippered feet, and a white anxious face unadorned by painted roses. More than once since Thursday night she had entreated to be allowed to see Arthur Holroyde. He was an old friend of her husband's, she told Mrs. Browning, and had been concerned in the adjustment of her husband's affairs. If his life were really in danger, it was quite necessary that she should see him.

The housekeeper had conveyed this fact to the family-surgeon, and that gentleman had conveyed it to Mr. Holroyde.

"Unless there is a very powerful reason for

your seeing this lady, I should most strongly recommend you to decline the interview," said the doctor; "so much depends upon your being kept quiet."

This had happened while there was still a faint ray of hope for Mr. Holroyde.

"There is no reason whatever that I should see her," the sick man answered coolly. "Pray tell Mrs. Harding that a man who has had a bullet through his lungs is in no condition for society, and beg her to leave me in peace. You will convey the request civilly, of course."

So Blanche Harding had not been admitted to the dying man's chamber. She had sent him three little notes, every one of which he had read attentively, and had torn into infinitesimal fragments after perusal. To the last of these he sent back a message to the effect that he would "think about it;" and with this very vague answer the widow was obliged to be content.

But she was not content. Some terrible fear seemed to oppress her; and she spent many hours in restless wandering to and fro her spacious

chamber, the door of which was generally locked against intruders. She had kept her room ever since the eventful Thursday night; that "dreadful neuralgia" being an all-sufficient excuse for her retirement. Whatever this woman's history had been, her life seemed to have reached some crisis now, while Arthur Holroyde lay dying in the room below her own. More than once she had stolen out of the corridor in the dead of the night to listen for any sound in the sick-room: and on each occasion she had heard enough to convince her of the closeness of the watch that was kept there.

"I must see him," she said to herself; "I *must* see him. Does he mean to play me false, I wonder? It would be like him to do so. In all the old legends of crime and horror there comes a time when the devil abandons his colleagues: and Arthur Holroyde has always been my idea of the devil."

On Monday morning Mrs. Harding was told that there was no hope for her husband's old friend. She had risen to take her breakfast that

day—such a piteous pretence of breakfast as it was—and sat in an easy-chair by the fire, dressed in a loose morning-gown of purple cashmere. But she still complained of neuralgia, and her face was deadly pale against the rich dark hue of her dress.

"Then there is no hope, Mrs. Browning?" she said.

"None, ma'am, as I understand from what our own doctor told me. The London doctor went away at eight o'clock this morning. We are to telegraph to him at four to-day, if there is any change for the better; but Mr. Redmond told me that there was no chance of our having to send any such message, and that the London doctor knew as much. 'He won't come back again,' says Mr. Redmond; 'and he knows that he won't.'"

"Will Mr. Holroyde be allowed to see any one to-day?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"I don't know, ma'am. I suppose if he wishes to see any one, he'll be allowed to do so; but he is very weak. He was light-headed in the night, and didn't know me or the doctor; and oh, ma'am,

it is so sad to hear any one like that, talking about all sorts of places and singing little snatches of foreign songs, and talking foreign languages sometimes: but he's quite sensible this morning, and speaks so nicely to me and every one. 'You're a good creature, Mrs. Browning,' he said, 'and I know you very well this morning, though last night I took you for the man who was Pope thirty years ago, when I was a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, and I saw you sitting in one of the state-rooms of the—' there, ma'am, I quite forget the name of the place he mentioned—' nearly seven feet high—and robed in white from head to foot, like a great marble statue; and oh, what a glorious fellow that Pope was, Mrs. Browning!' he said; 'and how nobly he hated the French; and what happy days those Roman days were for me!' and then he sighed, ma'am, as if his heart was breaking. Mr. Silbrook has been with him already this morning, and is with him still, I daresay; and oh, ma'am, what a dear good patient creature that Mr. Silbrook is in such times as these! He comes and goes, and he

comes and goes as quietly as a shadow.' 'Don't preach, my good fellow,' Mr. Holroyde said to him this morning; 'but sit there and read the New Testament to me; it is the most beautiful book that ever was written. Marat was reading it when Mademoiselle Corday stuck the dagger into his back; and I don't suppose I'm a much worse man than Marat.'"

This, with a good deal of trying back and considerable mispronunciation of proper names, was the account which Mrs. Browning gave of her patient. When she had paid her visit of duty to Mrs. Harding, and had retired to take some rest, while the chieftainess of the housemaids, who was middle-aged and experienced, took her place in the sick-chamber, the widow sat staring at the fire, and thinking of what she was to do with herself.

"Some women would run away if they found themselves in my position," she thought; "but I will stay here till he is dead. If he keeps my secret faithfully, his death will be my release from slavery. If he betrays me —? Why even then,

when the worst comes to the worst, I can run away.' I am not afraid that Sir Jasper will denounce me; and I suppose Godfrey Pierrepoint has really gone back to Africa."

But Mrs. Harding was prudent even when most daring. She devoted the better part of that morning to the task of packing her trunks, and stowed away her trappings and trinkets with as much care and neatness as if her mind had been free from anxiety. She even wrote the labels for her luggage. It was to be forwarded to the Pantechnicon—to be left there till sent for.

"If the very worst happens to me, that is a safe course," she said; "for it may be very necessary for me to avoid the chance of being traced. I can tell them here that my movements will be uncertain for the next few months."

The widow seemed a little easier in her mind after having made these arrangements. She dressed herself carefully in the costume which she had selected for her travels, should she have sudden need to leave the Abbey. Thus prepared at all points, and "equal to either fortune," she sat

in her easy-chair waiting for her doom. The day was dark and dull, and all the four winds seemed to have made an appointment to meet one another in the woods of Scarsdale. The gaunt elms and poplars swayed to and fro with a dismal motion, as if they had been rocking themselves in a paroxysm of grief for Arthur Holroyde: and how nearly the wailing of wind in an ancient stone chimney can resemble the sobbing of a human voice in direst anguish, the woman who called herself Blanche Harding learned that day for the first time.

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM A SINNER VILER THAN YOU ALL."

EIGHT o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock struck, and still Sir Jasper Denison and his daughter sat in the yellow drawing-room waiting for the coming of Godfrey Pierrepoint.

Marcia sat very quietly, lost in a profound reverie as it seemed. She could not make any pretence of frivolous occupation at such a time. To her mind there was an awful solemnity about the meeting that was likely to take place between Godfrey and his bitterest enemy. By what various paths had these men wandered, to meet at last in an awful hour, in which all human anger, all mortal desire for vengeance, must die out beneath the dread influence of death! Ah, surely, the handiwork of Heaven appeared very palpably in the events of these few last days, in which Godfrey

Pierrepoint had been brought from the extremity of Europe by a lover's foolish fancy, while Arthur Holroyde's dark course was arrested by the hand of an assassin. Sir Jasper tossed about his papers and magazines in the restlessness of his spirit, as the solemn hours of that long evening crept slowly by. He cast furtive glances at his daughter every now and then, longing to penetrate the mysteries of her heart.

"What an inscrutable creature she is!" he thought. "I gave her credit for having a lump of solid ice in her breast where other women have the things they call hearts; and she has been in love with my dear old African traveller all the time! Why the deuce didn't they confide in me? I suppose Pauncefort was afraid his poverty would stand in his way. He is full of Quixotic nonsense, I daresay, and would not ask a woman to marry him unless he could produce a thousand of his own for every thousand of hers. I think I must look into this business; for if my African friend and Marcia would only make a match of it, I should be free to pair-off with the lively widow."

So, after skimming the cream of his newspapers and reviews, Sir Jasper took courage to address his daughter.

"Marcia," he said, "how does it happen that Pauncefort's name is not Pauncefort after all? You spoke of him as Pierrepoint just now, when you were talking to poor Holroyde."

"His name is Pierrepoint, papa. He told me his real name in confidence; I had no right to betray his secret."

"But why should he have any secrets, or why should he use a name that is not his own? Is he in debt, and hiding from his creditors?"

"Oh, no, no."

"Then who the deuce is he hiding from?"

"From no one, papa. Pray do not question me about Mr. Pierrepoint to-night. The secret he told me involved the history of his life, which is a very sad one. You will see him to-night, I hope; and if you question him yourself, I daresay he will trust you. Believe me, papa, he is a good and honourable man, and the mystery that surrounds his life has arisen from no wrong-doing of his."

"I can quite believe that," answered Sir Jasper; "and I'll only ask you one more question. Has Pauncefort—or Pierrepoint—or whatever you choose to call him—ever made you an offer of marriage?"

"Never, papa."

"Humph," thought the Baronet; "I must see into this. I shouldn't mind playing the *Deus ex machinâ*. A grown-up daughter and a lively widow are *not* compatible."

It was past eleven when Godfrey Pierrepoint went back to the Hermitage, where he found Sir Jasper's groom waiting for him. He had lingered in the neighbourhood, loth to leave the shelter of that woodland retreat in which he had first learned to love a good and noble woman. The solitary shelter was very dear to him: and though he had no hope of seeing Marcia again, he found it unspeakably difficult to tear himself away.

"My Asiatic exploration is forbidden me," he thought; "and I must endure my life amidst the din and glitter of civilisation. Sweet rural Eng-

land—the dear land that holds her—is to be no home for me. Let me linger a little over my farewell. I will tramp the country-side about this place for a day or two, and then start on a walking-trip northward to Pierrepoint. I should like to see the church beneath which my mother and father lie buried, and the garden where I played when I was a child. No one in Pierrepoint will recognise any vestige of the lad they knew in my dark bearded face."

So once more the hardy pedestrian emerged from Scarsdale in the cold dawn of early morning; once more the untiring wanderer marched over desolate tracts of heathery common land under the autumn sky, and took his scanty meals in lonely hostelries, where a passing wagoner, or a drover tramping homeward from some distant market-town, were his sole companions. Once more Godfrey Pierrepoint, the exile, felt the breath of English breezes, and looked tenderly upward to the cold clear blue of English skies.

Such pains had he taken during these few days to avoid all who knew him, that he had only heard

the story of the outrage in the wood from deaf Dame Tursgood, who gave him a very bewildering version of the mischance which had befallen Sir Jasper's guest, and who could not tell him the name of that unfortunate gentleman.

"I think it was something beginning with a *ho*," said the old woman; "Ory—or Oroy—or something like that; but I *am* so hard of hearing."

Thus it happened that Mr. Pierrepoint remained entirely ignorant of the neighbourhood of his foe. A thunderbolt falling at his feet from a serene sky could not have been more astounding to him than the intelligence which he received from Sir Jasper Denison's groom.

Mr. Holroyde was dying, and he was most anxious to see Mr. Pauncefort before it was too late. This was what the man had to say; and over and above this message there was a little note from Sir Jasper, containing these few lines:

"DEAR PAUNCEFORT,—Poor Holroyde can't last many hours. He wants to see you; and talks about making an atonement for some wrong he

has done you. I suppose it's only a dying man's fancy; but it will be civil of you to come.—Yours,

"J. D."

"How long is it since you left the Abbey?" asked Godfrey.

"I've been waiting for you here ever since seven o'clock, sir. Would you like to take my horse, sir? he's ready saddled. Shall I bring him round?"

"Yes. I will ride to the Abbey."

This was all Godfrey Pierrepoint said. In less than five minutes he had mounted the groom's horse, and was galloping along the dark road by which Arthur Holroyde had left the Abbey. He found the park-gates open; the woman at the lodge had been told to be on the watch for his coming. "An atonement!" he thought; "what atonement can he give me for my blighted life?"

He saw the lighted windows of the library and the drawing-room as he stopped to dismount at the eastern end of the terrace. A man ran out from the stable-regions at the sound of his horse's

hoofs, and took the animal from him. Every arrangement had been made to facilitate his coming, and the servants were all on the alert to receive him. One of the drawing-room windows opened as he set his foot on the terrace, and he heard the voice of Sir Jasper calling to him, "Is that you, Pauncefort?"

In the next minute he was in the lighted drawing-room—his eyes dazzled by the sudden change from the darkness. He had scarcely time to be conscious of Marcia's presence, before the Baronet hustled him out of the room.

"Go to the poor fellow at once," he said; "Hills tells me that he has been asking about you ever so many times this evening."

Not one moment's pause in which to collect his thoughts was given to Godfrey Pierrepoint before he was ushered into the chamber in which his mortal foe lay dying.

His mortal foe! Oh, what a feeble, helpless creature was that brilliant Arthur Holroyde, who had done so much mischief upon this earth! What a homily might have been preached upon that poor

wreck of humanity, if an eloquent preacher had been there to utter it! Poor Winstanley Silbrook was not eloquent. He was only good and faithful: and he had been sitting in his corner by the bedside reading and praying with admirable patience and devotion through the evening, and had known no sense of weariness.

How many of those divine words fell on a stubborn heart and found no echo, or how far the wondrous wisdom of approaching death had enlightened the mind of the sinner, was a question that the curate did not venture to ask or to answer. The apostle has done enough when he has planted and watered; and with God alone rests the issue of the harvest.

In a moment — as if a great sea had arisen to devour them—Godfrey Pierrepoint's vengeful feelings melted out of his mind. A mightier than he had taken Arthur Holroyde's destiny into His hand, and mortal vengeance fled away awe-stricken before the presence of Divinity.

"Sit there," said the dying man, "and let the room be cleared."

Curate, nurse, doctor, and valet disappeared from the chamber like obedient shadows, and Godfrey Pierrepoint was alone with his wife's destroyer.

"I have not sent for you to ask your forgiveness," said Arthur Holroyde. "There are wrongs which no man can forgive, and the wrong I did you is one of them. You are a Christian, I am told; and when I am dead you will teach yourself to forget me. For the past I can do nothing; for the present, I think I can do something. If you were free to win another wife and create another home, would you have any inclination to do so?"

"God alone knows why you torture me by such a question," said Godfrey. "Yes, if I were free, I would choose another wife—I would seek to build another home."

"Then marry the woman of your choice—to-morrow if you please, Godfrey Pierrepoint. Your wife has been dead more than a year."

"My wife—dead? Why I have seen her here—here—in this house—within the last year!"

"No, you have not. You have seen her twin-

sister, Leonora Fane, who has been enjoying your pension since poor Caroline's death."

"O God! can there be such villany in the world?"

"Yes," answered Arthur Holroyde; "necessity is very villanous. You have been a fortunate man; good things have dropped into your lap since you were young; good fortune came to you while you were still fresh, and true, and honest. I have been waiting for her all my life; and every year of my waiting has found me a worse man than I was the year before. Do you remember what the mad poet Cowper said?—'There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy.' That, Godfrey Pierrepoint, is the sort of world in which penniless gentlemen live. You are rich, and I am an adventurer. The rich man is the adventurer's lawful prey; and I have preyed upon you. I am dying now, and I can afford to throw up the cards that I can no longer hold. I don't know whether I am sorry for what I have done, but I do know that I am ashamed of its baseness. I am an an-

achronism, Mr. Pierrepoint. I was created to be a gentlemanly brigand, the terror and admiration of medieval Europe; and modern society has obliged me to be a vulgar, plotting scoundrel. But I must not be discursive. A man who has been shot through the lungs has no time to waste on digression."

He carried himself with a certain air of gaiety even now. It was so much his nature to take things easily, that even the hand of death was scarcely strong enough to restrain the airy lightness of his manner.

"Your wife, Caroline Pierrepoint, died at Naples," he said. "She had been declining for some time, and her sister had taken her from place to place in the hope of preserving a life which was worth fifteen hundred a-year to her. I met them at Ancona, and I saw the red danger-flag in Caroline's cheeks, and knew that she was dying of consumption. I think the sisters loved each other, and that Leonora was really distressed by the idea of losing Caroline. I met her one evening, after the doctor had pronounced your wife's doom, and

she spoke of herself, and her future. 'When Caroline is gone, there will be nothing before me but the workhouse,' she said. 'I may drag on my life as a governess for a few years, if I can find any one who will accept my services with such a character as I can contrive to give myself; and then when I get old—there is the workhouse.'

"She said a good deal more in the same strain, and I was really sorry for her. If I had been a rich man, I should have helped her with my purse, and should have left her happy in the consciousness of my own benevolence. As I had not a five-pound note that I could call my own, I could only assist her with my brains; and in doing so I committed a crime. That is one of the differences between wealth and poverty. 'All that you remark is perfectly true, my dear Mrs. Fane,' I said. 'You would be a pauper if Caroline died. But why should Caroline die? why should Mrs. Pierrepoint, who has a comfortable annuity of fifteen hundred pounds, depart this life, leaving Mrs. Fane, who has not sixpence per annum, to lament her loss? especially when Mrs. Pierrepoint and

Mrs. Fane resemble each other so closely, that very few of their dearest friends would be able to distinguish one from the other. Would it not be better for poor Mrs. Fane to die of consumption, and for rich Mrs. Pierrepoint to live on in the enjoyment of the annuity paid her by her husband's attorney, who is the simplest old fogie in Christendom, and who never leaves his own musty old office? Mrs. Pierrepoint, who has been known on the Continent only as Mrs. Harding, has been leading such a wandering life lately, that the foreign doctors who have attended her, and the foreign hotel-keepers who have received her as their guest, can scarcely know her name. Why shouldn't she go somewhere else, where the foreign doctors and hotel-keepers will receive her as Mrs. Fane, and where, if she must die, she may die and be buried under that name?' I suppose you understand the plot now, Mr. Pierrepoint?"

"Yes," Godfrey answered quietly. "I am sorry so much trouble was taken to deceive me; I would gladly have paid fifteen hundred a-year for my liberty."

"Ah, but we could not be sure of that, you see," Mr. Holroyde answered coolly. "We would have given you your liberty with great pleasure, if we had known you would have paid for it handsomely. Our little conspiracy was very easily managed. Poor Caroline was taken to Naples, where she was too ill to leave her own room. Leonora nursed her with the devotion of an angel, or a Sister of Charity; but she took care to let the doctors and the people at the hotel know that the invalid was Mrs. Fane, the widow of an Indian officer. Of course, if the doctor happened to address his patient by that name, it was the stupid fellow's mistake, and not worth dear Caroline's notice. She died a fortnight after her arrival in Naples, and was buried there under the name of Leonora Fane. Her sister left the place immediately after her death, and took care to avoid the old places in which they had been seen together."

"But, great Heaven," cried Godfrey Pierrepoint, "the scar — the scar which I remember on Caroline's arm! One day when I was talking to the woman who pretended to be my wife,

some scarcely palpable difference, the intonation of a word struck upon my ear, and for the moment I fancied I had been duped. But when I grasped the woman's arm, I saw the scar that had been familiar to me on the arm of my wife."

Mr. Holroyde shrugged his shoulders. "That's very possible," he said indifferently; "Leonora is a wonderful woman, and it is not to be supposed she would allow so small a matter as a scar to baffle her; and now, as the deception I suggested has lasted little more than a twelvemonth, I hope you will say something generous to me before I die."

For some minutes there was profound silence while Godfrey Pierrepoint sat motionless by the side of the dying man. Yet it may be that during the silence as earnest a prayer went up as any that was ever uttered aloud before assembled mankind. After that silent prayer, Godfrey turned to his old enemy.

"I hope that God will forgive you as completely as I do, Arthur Holroyde," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO LETTERS.

BEFORE day dawned upon the darkness of that night Sir Jasper's guest was dead; and the dawn found Sir Jasper and his tenant closeted together in the yellow drawing-room, where all the glitter of pictures and *bric-à-brac* looked wan in the light of expiring candles.

Mr. Pierrepoint had told his landlord the story of his wedded life, and the character of the lady then sheltered by the Abbey roof.

"I warned you against this person before, Sir Jasper," said Godfrey, when he had concluded the story of Leonora Fane's treachery.

"You did," answered the Baronet, with a deprecating gesture, "and I disregarded your warning; and now you heap coals of fire on my head by interfering a second time to preserve me

from the consequences of my own infatuation. My dear Pierrepoint, you don't know what a demented idiot I have been. I was going to marry that woman. Yes, I was prepared to make one great gulp and swallow any thing in the way of antecedent history that she might please to invent for me. I knew that she was not a particularly good woman—one can hardly expect a brilliant creature like that to be particularly good, you know—but I liked her. She was agreeable to me; and you will allow that in the matter of millinery she is unapproachable. Good women are so apt to be neglectful of their millinery. They will not follow the precepts of those delightful Messieurs de Goncourt, and remember that an irreproachable creature is all the more delightful when she possesses the faintest *parfum de Lorette*. However, I must not forget to thank you for having given me this warning. The lively widow shall receive her *congé*. I shall miss her: yes, I confess that I shall miss her. But I shall write to Mr. Woods, to inquire if there is any thing of Rubens's or Etty's likely to drop into the market;

and if there is, I'll run up to Christie's and buy it. 'In the mean time, the widow shall go."

But Mrs. Harding, otherwise Mrs. Fane, did not wait to receive her *congé* from Sir Jasper Denison. When Mr. Hills took the Baronet his breakfast at two o'clock in the afternoon that succeeded Arthur Holroyde's death, he carried a dainty little patchouli-perfumed note on the tray, which he placed on the table beside his master's bed. The Baronet recognised the widow's dashing caligraphy. The hand had not trembled once, though the letter had been written immediately after Leonora Fane had been told, that Arthur Holroyde and Godfrey Pierrepoint were closeted together. The Baronet sighed plaintively as he perused the note, which ran thus:

"DEAR SIR JASPER,—A letter received late this afternoon summons me to town to the dear friend whose ill-health you have already heard of."

"I am afraid the 'dear friend' is only a genteel Mrs. Harris," thought the Baronet sadly. "What a pity a woman with such an outline

should not be the sort of person a gentleman can marry!"

"This time," continued the letter, "I fear the case is *really serious*, and I have decided on leaving Roxborough by the first train, though, by so doing, I shall lose all chance of bidding adieu to you, and of thanking you with my own lips for all your goodness. How dear the memory of that goodness will be to me when I am far away from you and Scarsdale, I dare not trust myself to write now; for my heart is very, very sad, dear Sir Jasper, and something tells me that this separation between you and me may be a long one."

"Tears," murmured the Baronet, as he examined some pale smears upon the paper. "And yet I daresay tears are very easy to produce; I know too much of the tricks of the picture-dealers to be taken in by that sort of thing."

He went on with the letter:

"Farewell, then, Sir Jasper. I leave this dear dwelling with a gloomy foreboding of future sorrow. I have enemies — enemies whose dark machinations it would be vain to endeavour to

explain. Better, perhaps, that I should rest under the dark shadows they may spread around me. I write wildly. I dare not read what I have written. I ask you to believe no good of me, Sir Jasper, except that the memory of you, and all that you have been to me, will be the most treasured recollection of my mind.

"Ever gratefully and faithfully yours,

"BLANCHE HARDING.

"P.S. A letter, with the old Maida-Hill address, will always reach me. My luggage I have left to be sent to the Pantechnicon, as my movements for the present are very uncertain."

"What a wonderful woman!" thought the Baronet; "throughout her letter there is not a word that commits her to any thing, good, bad, or indifferent. And she reminds me that the old address will always find her. Circean charmer! If I were a weak man, that letter would make a fool of me. As it is—well—I must never trust myself in the neighbourhood of Maida Hill."

There was another letter delivered in Scarsdale

Abbey that morning — a letter which one of the women-servants carried to Miss Denison's room long before Sir Jasper's own man presumed to disturb the sybarite slumbers of his master.

Marcia's heart thrilled as she recognised Godfrey Pierrepoint's handwriting. She knew nothing of the nature of that interview which had taken place between Godfrey and the man who now lay dead in the darkened chamber below. She only knew that they had been closeted together for upwards of an hour, and that there had been peace.

"His farewell letter!" she thought sadly, as she tore open the envelope.

But it was not a farewell letter; it was a lover's letter, written with all the freedom of a hand that is not forbidden to betray the secrets of its master's soul.

"My own Beloved!" wrote Godfrey Pierrepoint,—"I dare call you thus now; I dare call you any thing that is tender and sweet; and in all the world you are the only creature who has any right to bid me hold my hand. O Marcia, my

pen would fain run riot over the paper, so wild an impulse moves it as I write to you to-night. But the shadow of death is close at hand, and I must needs be saddened a little by that solemn influence.

"My own one—my own one—my precious wife that is to be in the dear days that are to come! The barrier that separated you and me was never any more than a lying shadow. When I fancied myself divided from you by an impassable abyss, I was only the dupe of a shameful conspiracy. I was a free man, dearest, when I first looked in your sweet face, first saw the graceful figure in the warm glow of the firelight, and heard the *frôlement* of your robe.

'In your lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad with wings.'

I was a free man, Marcia! I might have fallen on my knees in the firelight that autumn evening to beseech you for my bride. I might have done any thing that is mad, or wild, or desperate. I don't suppose I really did love you then, though I cannot remember a time in which I did not love you.

"I am not going back to St. Petersburg. The

steppes of Siberia, the Caucasus, the Amoor, and the Chinese Wall may be swallowed in an earthquake, so far as I am personally concerned in their preservation. I am going North, but no farther north than Pierrepoint, where there is a mouldy old castle, that must be made ready for a fair young châtelaine. Ah, what happiness to let loose the decorators and upholsterers, and cry havoc upon moths and dust! What happiness to prepare a beautiful nest for my dove! What unutterable joy to begin a new existence in the place where my name means truth and honour; and to know that no ghost from the old life can arise to overshadow my bliss!

"I cannot tell you what my movements may be for the next few weeks; it will be so difficult for me to stay away from Scarsdale. But I have all my new life to plan. O Marcia! it is like a resurrection from the grave.

"In any case, I shall not come near the Abbey until that unhappy man has been laid peacefully in his grave. He dies so friendless and lonely that the doctors whom your father pays will be the

only followers in his funeral train; unless, indeed, Colonel Slingsby cares to pay a last poor tribute of friendship to a boon companion. I am sure it will please you to know that we parted in peace, and that I was able to forgive him as freely for the wrong he has done me as I hope my own errors may be forgiven.

"And now adieu, my own one; and this adieu is no sad farewell, but only the pretty flimsy word which means a brief good-night. I shall write to you to-morrow from Pierrepoint. Will you send me one little line to the Castle, to tell me you have not suffered very much by the catastrophe that has brought gloom and death within your doors? One little line in the hand I love will seem like a pledge of that future happiness which is so bright a thing that I tremble lest it should be too fair and beautiful a vision ever to be more substantial than a day-dream. I have told your father my history, and have his best wishes for the prosperity of my suit; so I dare to sign myself your faithful and adoring

"GODFREY."

CHAPTER XIV.

"AFTER MANY DAYS."

GODFREY PIERREPOINT'S day-dream has been realised in the years that have gone by since the death of Arthur Holroyde: and other children play now in the old-fashioned garden which is only divided by a low boundary-wall from the hidden graves of a forgotten churchyard. The orchards and gardens of the Grange are the favourite playground of the children from the Castle. The little ones like the apples on those old espaliers better than any fruit that is grown in the prim kitchen-gardens of the loftier domain. They prefer the grassy lawn and the cottage-flowers, the sweet-williams and London-pride, the stocks and mignonette, and the glorious cabbage-roses which were the chief joy of their dead grandmother, to all the grandeurs of the Castle pleasaunce, where stately peacocks

screech at them, and where solemn gardeners look unhappy if a stray leaflet is dropped on the smooth gravel.

Happy children, on whose fair young heads all Fortune's gifts fall in a golden shower! Happy children, whose name in the place of their birth is synonymous with nobility and honour! Happy children, about and around whom there breathes so pure an atmosphere of love that the young faces seem still to reflect the brightness of the angels who have smiled upon them in their baby-dreams!

And while the children play in the gardens of the Grange, Marcia and Godfrey are sometimes away in London; for the name of Pierrepoint is fast becoming a power in the ranks of the more advanced of English Conservatives; and more than once in the course of every session Sir Jasper Denison has the pleasure of reading some grand speech of his son-in-law's commented upon in his favourite *Times*.

Godfrey Pierrepoint has indeed begun a new life. Love, ambition, success—all the brightest flowers that make the crown of existence—blos-

som now for him, for him! And sometimes in a dream he fancies himself on the burning shores of the white Nile, and awakes in a feverish terror to remember his desolate youth, and to thank God for the gladness of his manhood.

And when the session is over, and he is free to fly back to the children at Pierrepoint, the grave African wanderer of the past, the earnest senator of the present, is transformed all at once into the lightest-hearted boyish traveller who ever sped northwards by express-train. In the Grange gardens, where he played in his childhood, he plays now with his children: and lying on the grass with the latest parliamentary reports open under his elbow, he is disturbed by tiny flaxen-haired toddlers, who insist on being taken to Banbury Cross, or enlightened as to the proceedings of that celebrated family of pigs whose leading member went to market.

Is it necessary to say that the Pierrepoint poor rejoice in the residence of their chieftain and his tender-hearted wife, or that the Castle is a land flowing with milk and honey for the surrounding

peasantry? There are strong-minded ladies in the neighbourhood, who threaten Marcia with the direful effects that are likely to arise out of her undiscerning charities; but Marcia pleads that if she waited to find faultless recipients for her benevolence, she should never give to any body.

"I am very sorry that James Price will not attend the two services, Miss Warlock," she replies to an importunate lady; "but I hear that he is a good husband and a most affectionate father, and that his drowsiness after dinner is really constitutional; so I don't see any reason for withholding the new milk that his children are allowed to have from the Castle dairy."

Mrs. Pierrepoint has a trusty ally in her own particular curate, Mr. Silbrook, on whom the Pierrepoint benefice was bestowed when the old incumbent died. He came to Yorkshire, delighted to return to his old slavery, and as happy to serve Mrs. Pierrepoint as he had been to wait upon the footsteps of Miss Denison. He loves her still; but in his soul love is so pure a flame that it burns

with as subdued and steady a radiance as the deathless lamp on a Roman-Catholic altar.

Sir Jasper comes often to Pierrepoint; and he makes his son-in-law's town-house his head-quarters when he has occasion to attend Christie's auction-room. He likes his grandchildren amazingly—from a good point of sight. "Place them on a level with my eye, and let me get a north-west light upon them," he says entreatingly, as he hands the little ones back to their nurses. "Yes, quite equal to Sant—very transparent and pearly. I shouldn't be surprised if that boy were to develop into a Gainsborough; and if he does, I shall leave him the whole of my fortune. You will not let him disturb my Ettys when I am dead and gone, will you, Pierrepoint? I think I should turn in my grave if any wretch were to put my Psyche in a bad light."

With the children in the Grange gardens there is some one who is not a servant, and yet not quite a governess—a gentle tender creature,

who idolises the little people with whom her life is chiefly spent, who is very apt to call Mrs. Pierrepoint "Miss Marcia," and whom the Castle servants address respectfully as Miss Tursgood.

Poor Dorothy's brief romance has ended in sudden darkness. She knows that the verdict of the coroner's jury which branded Gervoise Catheron with the name of a murderer was only too just a decision: and every night in her prayers she thanks God for his escape from the hangman's hand, and prays that his penitence may be received by Divine mercy.

He escaped the hangman. Another man, careful of his life, winding and twisting in accordance with some deep-laid plan of cheating justice, might have fallen into the very jaws of his pursuers. Gervoise Catheron, utterly careless of his wretched existence, and flying blindly, rather in some wild hope of escaping from his own remorseful conscience than with any idea of evading the consequences of his crime, managed to baffle the sharpest of metropolitan detectives, the most determined of provincial police.

He left Roxborough by the mail-train on the very night of the murder, and went straight to Liverpool by an early express on the following morning. Chance, favouring him who was reckless of his life as she never favours the man whose dearest hope is to preserve his existence, afforded him an immediate opportunity of escape from England. One of the Cunard steamers started for New York on the very day of his arrival in Liverpool; and Gervoise Catheron, with a portmanteau of ready-made garments, bought of a Jew in a back-slum of the town, started with her. The Jew was quick to see the account of the Scarsdale murder, and the numbers of the missing notes, and to compare these numbers with the money he had taken from the pale traveller, who bought his goods in such a hurry. The Israelitish merchant sent the suspicious notes abroad, and was dumb with regard to Mr. Catheron's visit to his establishment. The detective searched Liverpool in vain for any clue to the lieutenant's movements. The papers which he examined in the ship-brokers' offices

afforded no evidence strong enough to justify action. So he went back to London, baffled and disheartened, to be sent down to Leeds to investigate a great forgery case, which promised to be even more important than the Scarsdale murder.

Dorothy was three-and-twenty years of age, and Godfrey and Marcia had been married five years, when there appeared in the American correspondence of the London newspapers an account of the death of a poor half-starved creature, who had picked up his miserable living as a card-sharper and billiard-marker in the vilest haunts of New York, and who on his wretched deathbed confessed himself the murderer of Arthur Holroyde. His confession had been duly attested by the authorities, who were summoned at his own special entreaty; and the very words of that confession were made public.

"He had injured me and mine," said the dying man, "and I hated him. I was mad and desperate for want of a certain sum of money, and I knew that he had six times that sum about

him, and that the money in his possession ought by rights to have been mine. I did not think much about what I was going to do; but I put a loaded pistol in my pocket, and I went to the wood through which I knew he must pass, and lay quiet among the fern waiting for him. When I heard his horse's hoofs, I got up, and climbed upon a bank that overhung the road. From this bank I took my aim; he groaned once, and fell off his horse. I found the money I wanted in his waistcoat-pocket — the only one of his pockets which I touched. I did not wait to see whether he was dead, but went back to Marlborough, where I had some business to transact, and from there to Roxborough, where I reached the station three minutes before the departure of the mail-train."

To Dorothy this was a very sad story; but she has learned to take some comfort from the hope that her lover died penitent. And though the smiles and dimples of eighteen are missing in the gentle young woman of three-and-twenty, there

may come a time when the old wounds will heal, and new happiness may arise for poor Dorothy from the ashes of her dead. One may venture to hope so much for a broken-hearted young person of three-and-twenty.

Dorothy goes southward once a-year to see her own family, and on these occasions she always meets her cousin Selina and the lively Dobb; but she does not care to go near Amanda Villas, where the memory of her lost lover afflicts her with cruel anguish. The Dobbs are prosperous, for the stern Sloper has discovered by bitter experience that there are not many clerks to be had as sharp or as trustworthy as Henry Adolphus: and the repentant Dobb has taken the lesson of his youth very deeply to heart, and would as soon enter into a compact with the foul fiend as he would involve himself in any sporting adventure with the knowing ones of Farringdon Street or the Peter-Piper tavern. Sloper and Halliday have increased his annual stipend by thirty pounds, and the Sunday evening reunions are more frequently wound-up by cold baked meats than of old, while Mr. Dobb's

"Tippettywitchet" and "Hot Codlins" are more like the real thing than ever.

And while domestic happiness reigns alike amidst the grandeurs of Pierrepoint Castle and in the lowly chambers of Amanda Villas, a haggard pensioner on Godfrey Pierrepoint's bounty haunts small German spas, and loses her pitiful stakes at third-rate gaming-tables. Her name is Leonora Fane, and she lives upon a hundred a-year, which is sent to her in quarterly instalments by Godfrey's lawyers, for Marcia and her husband would fain secure this wretched woman from the necessity of sin. She accepts the dole churlishly enough, and hates the giver: and if in the out-of-the-way places where she drags out her existence any mention of Godfrey Pierrepoint's parliamentary triumphs, or of his wife's social graces, happen to reach her ear, the ghastly painted face contracts spasmodically and the false eyebrows lower over dark angry eyes. She is a slave tied to the chariot-wheels of Nemesis, and the Goddess of Vengeance seems loth to lose her hold upon

her victim. For women who have sinned and suffered, Death sometimes comes in the guise of a kind and pitiful friend and releases the bonds of their captivity. But Death will have nothing to do with Leonora Fane: her day of repentance or release is still in the future.

THE END.

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